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JESSIE TRIM.

VOL. I.



JESSIE TRIM.

A Novel.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "BLADE-O'-GRASS," "GOLDEN GRAIN," "BREAD-AND-CHEESE AND
KISSES," "GRIF," "LONDON'S HEART," AND "JOSHUA MARVEL."

VOL. I.

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JESSIE TRIM.

CHAPTER I.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S WEDDING.

As my earliest remembrances are associated with my grandmother's wedding, it takes natural precedence here of all other matter. I was not there, of course, but I seem to see it through a mist, and I have a distinct impression of certain actors in the scene. These are : a smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone, my grandmother, my grandfather (whom I never saw in the flesh), and a man with a knob on the top of his head, making a meal off his finger-nails.

Naturally, this man's head is bald. Naturally, this man's nails are eaten down to the

quick. I am unable to state how I come to the knowledge of these details, but I know them, and am prepared to stand by them. Sitting, as I see myself, in a very low arm-chair—in which I am such an exact fit that when I rise it rises with me, much to my discomfort—I hear my grandmother say,

“He had a knob on the top of his head, and he was always eating his nails.”

Then a solemn pause ensues, broken by my grandmother adding, in a dismal tone:

“And the last time I set eyes on him was on my wedding-day.”

The words are addressed not so much to me as to the smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone, which had occupied the place of honour on the mantelpiece in my grandmother's house, and which she had brought with her as a precious relic—(Jane Painter, I remember, always called it a relict)—when she came to live with us. The head of this stone figure is loose, and wags upon the slightest provocation. When something falls in the room, when the door is slammed, when

a person walks sharply towards it, when it is merely looked at, I sometimes fancy. I am not prepossessed in its favour, and I regard it with uneasy feelings, as probably possessing a power for evil, like a malevolently-inclined idol. But my grandmother, for some mysterious reason, values it as a very precious possession, and sits staring dumbly at it for hours. I watch her and it until, in my imagination, its monkey-face begins to twitch and its monkey-lips to move. At a certain point of my watch, I fancy that its eyes roll and glare at me, and I cover mine with my hands, to shut out the disturbing sight. But I have not sufficient courage to remain blind for more than a very few moments, and I am soon fascinated into peeping at the figure through the lattice of my fingers. My grandmother observes me, and says,

“I see you, child! Take your fingers away.”

I obey her timidly, and with many a doubtful glance at the monkey-man, I ask,

“Does *it* see me, grandmother?”

My grandmother regards it with a gloomy

air; evidently she has doubts. She does not commit herself, however, but says,

“It will belong to you, child, when I am gone. It must be kept always in the family.”

The tone in which she utters these words denotes that evil will fall upon the family when this heirloom is lost sight of. I am not grateful for the prospective gift. It has already become a frightful incubus; it weighs me down, and is a future as well as a present torment. I think it has lived long enough—too long—and that when my grandmother goes, she ought to take it with her. Happening to catch the eye of the figure while this thought is in my mind, I am convinced that it shows in its ugly face a consciousness of my bad feeling towards it; its eyes and lips threaten me. It would have terrified, but it would not have surprised me to find it suddenly gifted with the power of speech, and to hear it utter dreadful words. But happily for my peace of mind no such miracle happens. I look at my grandmother, and I begin to fancy that she, from

long staring at it, bears in her face a resemblance to the face of the monkey-man. For how much longer will she sit and stare at it? For how many more days and weeks and years? She has frequently told me that naughty boys were invariably "fetched away" to a dismal place by Some One wearing horns and a tail. She makes no mention of naughty girls; and sometimes when she has been delighting me with these wholesome lessons, a sort of rebellion has possessed me that I was not born a girl. Now, if Some One were to come and "fetch" my grandmother away, it would not grieve me; I should rejoice. But I dare not for my life give utterance to my thought. Says my grandmother, with a nod at the stone figure, which, suddenly animated by a mysterious influence, returns the nod,

"I had it in my pocket on my wedding-day."

The circumstance of its being a guest at my grandmother's wedding invests it with an additional claim to my protection when she

is gone. How happy I should be if it would fall into the fire-place, and break into a thousand pieces !

“ Grandmother ! ”

“ Well, child.”

“ Was the man with the knob on the top of his head——”

My grandmother interrupts me.

“ You mean the gentleman, child.”

“ Yes, I mean the gentleman—and who was always eating his nails—was he like that ? ” pointing to the stone monkey-figure.

“ Like that, child ! How can such an idea have entered your head ? No ; he was a very handsome man.”

A pure fiction, I am convinced, if nothing worse. How *could* a man with a knob on his head, and who was always eating his nails, be handsome ?

“ Your grandfather used to be very jealous of him ; he was one of my sweethearts. I had several, and nine proposals of marriage before I was twenty years of age. Some girls that I knew were ready to scratch

their eyes out with vexation. *He* proposed, and wished to run away with me, but my family stepped in between us, and prevented him. You can never be sufficiently grateful to me, child; for what would have become of you if I had run away and married him, goodness only knows!"

The reflection which is thus forced upon me involves such wild entanglements of possibilities that I am lost in the contemplation of them. What *would* have become of me? Supposing it had occurred: should I ever have been?

"He told me," continues my grandmother, revelling in these honey-sweet reminiscences, "after I had accepted your grandfather, that life was valueless without me, and that as he had lost me, he would be sure to go to the Devil. I don't know the end of him, for I only saw him once after that; but he was a man of his word. He told me so in Lover's Walk, where I happened to be strolling one evening—quite by accident, child, I assure you, for I burnt the letter I

received from him in the morning, for fear your grandfather should see it. Your grandfather had a frightfully jealous disposition—as if I could help the men looking at me! When we were first married he used to smash a deal of crockery, with his quick temper. I hope he is forgiven for it in the place he has gone to. He was an auctioneer and valuer; he had an immense reputation as a valuer. It was not undeserved; he fell in love with me. Oh, he was clever, child, in his way!”

Although I am positive that I never saw my grandfather, I have, in some strange way, a perfect remembrance of him as a little man, very dapper, and very precisely dressed in a snuff-coloured coat and black breeches and stockings. Now, my grandmother was a very large woman; side by side they are, to my mind, a ridiculous match. I have grown quite curious concerning my grandmother’s lover, and I venture to recall her from a moody contemplation of the monkey-figure in which she is falling.

"But about the man with the knob, grandmother?" I commence.

"Child, you are disrespectful! The man with the knob, indeed!"

"The gentleman, I mean, who wanted to marry you. What was his name?"

"Bullpit. He was connected with the law, and might have become Lord Chancellor if I hadn't blighted him."

"Did he behave himself at your wedding, grandmother?"

"Save the child!" she exclaims. "You don't suppose that Mr. Bullpit was at my wedding, do you? Why, there would have been murder done! Your grandfather and he would have torn each other to pieces!" These latter words are spoken in a tone of positive satisfaction, as adding immensely to my grandmother's reputation.

"But I thought you said that the last time you saw him was on your wedding-day?"

"So I did, child; but I didn't say he was *at* the wedding. We were coming out of

church—— Deary, deary me! I can see it as if it was only yesterday that it took place! The church was scarcely three minutes' walk from mother's house, and the expense would not have been great, but your grandfather, who was a very mean man, did not provide carriages, and we had to go on foot. It was the talk of the whole neighbourhood for months afterwards. I never forgave him for it, and I can't forget it, although he is in his grave now, where all things ought to be forgotten and forgiven. Remember that, child, and if you have anything to forget and forgive, forget and forgive it. Animosity is a bad thing."

My grandmother gives me time to remember if I have anything to forget and forgive. I feel somewhat remorseful because of the hard thoughts I have borne towards her, and I mentally resolve that when she is in her grave I will endeavour to forget and forgive.

"We walked," she continues, "from mother's house to the church, and from the church back again. It was like a procession.

There were five bridesmaids, and mother and father, and your grandfather's mother and father,"—(I am a little confused here with so many mothers and fathers, and, notwithstanding my efforts to prevent it, they all get jumbled up with one another)—“whom we could very well have done without, and the Best Man, who did not how to behave himself, making the bridesmaids giggle as he did, as if my wedding was a thing to be laughed at! and a great number of guests with white favours in their coats—all but one, who ought to have known better, and who was properly punished afterwards by being jilted by Mary Morgan. Everybody in the town came to see us walk to church, and when the fatal knot was tied, the crowd round the church door was so large that we could scarcely make our way through it. The Best Man misbehaved himself shamefully. He pretended to be overcome by grief, and he sobbed in such a violent manner as to make the mob laugh at him, and the bridesmaids giggle more than ever. I knew

what they did it for, the hussies! They thought he was a catch; a nice husband he turned out to be afterwards! When we were half way between the church and mother's house, our procession met another procession, and for a minute or two there was a stoppage and great confusion, and several vulgar boys hurrayed. What do you think that other procession was, child?"

I ponder deeply, but am unable to guess.

"That other procession, child, was made up of policemen and riff-raff. And in the middle of it, with handcuffs on, was Anthony Bullpit. He had been arrested on a warrant for forgery. What with the confusion and the struggling, the processions got mixed up together, and as I raised my eyes I saw the eyes of Anthony Bullpit fixed upon me. Such a shock as that look of his gave me I shall never forget — never! I knew the meaning of it too well. It meant that all this had occurred through me; that life without me was a mockery; that he had arranged everything so that we should meet

immediately the fatal knot was tied ; and that he was on his road to—— where he said he would go.”

“He must have been a very wicked man, grandmother.”

“A wicked man, child ! How dare you ! He was as innocent as I was, and he did it all to punish me. I fainted dead away in the middle of the street, and had to be carried home, and have hartshorn given to me, and brown paper burnt under my nose. When I came to, I looked more like a black-moor than a bride, and my wedding dress was completely spoilt. And nothing of all this would have occurred, child, if it had not been for the meanness of your grandfather. If he had provided carriages *we* should never have met. When poor Mr. Bullpit was put upon his trial he would not make any defence. Your grandfather said the case was so clear that it would only have aggravated it to defend it. But I knew better. When he pleaded guilty, I knew that he did it to spite me, and to prove

that he was a man of his word. I wanted to go to the trial, but your grandfather objected; and when I said I *would* go, he locked all the doors in the house, and took the keys away with him. Your grandfather has much to answer for. Mr. Bullpit was transported for twenty-one years. Some wicked people said it was a mercy he wasn't hanged. If he had been, I should never have survived it. Poor Anthony!"

I was too young to exercise a proper judgment upon this incident in my grandmother's life, but it is imprinted indelibly upon my memory. I knew very well that I did not like my grandmother, and that I did not feel happy in her society. Often when I wished to go out into the sunshine to play, she would say,

"Bring the boy in here, and let him keep me company. It will do him more good than running about in the dirt."

And her word being law in the house, I used to be taken into the room where she sat in her arm-chair, staring at the monkey-

man on the mantelshelf, and used to be squeezed into my own little arm-chair, and placed in the corner to keep her company. And for a certain sufficient reason I deemed it advisable to be companionable; for once I had sulked, and was sullen and ill-tempered. Then my grandmother had said,

“The child is unwell! He must have some physic.”

And herself prescribed the medicine—jalap, which was my disgust and abhorrence—and the dose, which was not a small one. Out of that companionship sprang my knowledge of the man with the knob on the top of his head, and who was always eating his nails. By some process of reasoning I associate him with the smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone, and I hate them both honestly. As for Anthony Bullpit being innocent of the crime for which he was transported, I smile scornfully at the idea. He is my model for all that is disagreeable and bad, and I never see a man whose nails are bitten down to the quick without associating him—often

unjustly, I am sure—with meanness and trickery.

There was a reason for my being doomed to the companionship of my grandmother, and for my being made her victim as it were. Our family circle comprised five individuals: my grandmother, my father and mother, myself, and a baby-brother. My parents had, through no fault of their own, drifted into that struggling-genteel class of persons whose means never quite come up to their efforts to make an appearance. We had been a little better off once upon a time, but unfortunately my father's health had failed him, and at the period of which I am writing he was confined to his bed, unable to work. My mother, what with her anxiety and her ignorance of the world, was to a certain extent helpless. Therefore, when my grandmother proposed to come and live with us, and bring her servant, and pay so much a week for board and lodging, her offer was gladly accepted. It was a current belief that my grandmother had a "long stocking" some-

where, with plenty of money in it, and to this long stocking may be attributed much of my unhappiness at that time. For it had come to be recognised that I was to be my grandmother's heir, and that her long stocking would descend to me. It was, perhaps, regarded as a fair arrangement that, as my grandmother's property was to be mine when she was dead, I was to be my grandmother's property while she was alive; and I have no doubt that care was taken that her whims with respect to me should be carefully attended to, so that my inheritance might not be jeopardised. My mother did not know that I was unhappy; I was as a child somewhat secretive by nature, and I kept my thoughts and feelings much to myself. Besides, I had an intuitive perception of the state of affairs at home, and I felt that if I offended my grandmother my parents might suffer.

CHAPTER II.

I AM FRIGHTENED OF MY SHADOW.

I HAVE already mentioned the name of the servant whom my grandmother brought with her to our house ; it was Jane Painter. She had been with my grandmother for many years, from girlhood I believe, and she was now about thirty years of age. In appearance she was a thin, sharp-featured, pale-faced woman ; in manners she was a viciously-minded creature, fond of pinching children on the sly in tender places, assuming the while, to deceive observers, an expression of amiability, which intensified the malignity of her conduct. From the moment she entered our house she became the enemy of every person in it, and waged open and secret war

upon all of us. Her service with my grandmother had been a very easy one, but things were different when her mistress changed her residence. She had to do double the work she had been accustomed to, and as we were the direct cause of this, she was not slow in showing her resentment. My mother, patient as she always was, made light of the woman's infirmities of temper, believing that she was necessary to my grandmother; Jane Painter, however, declined to accept the olive-branch which my mother held out to her, and would certainly not have remained in the house but for one inducement. This was made clear to us a very few days after the change. My mother had occasion to remonstrate with her for some piece of impertinence, and Jane Painter ran into my grandmother's room in a fury, and demanded to know if she was to be treated like a galley-slave. My mother stood quietly by, listening to the servant's complainings. Said my grandmother,

“You must do what my daughter desires

you to do, Jane. I told her you would help her in the house."

"I won't be ordered about as if I was a bit of dirt!" exclaimed Jane Painter, gasping.

"O Jane!" remonstrated my mother.

"Don't 'O Jane' me!" and then followed the unreasoning argument, "I'm flesh and blood the same as you are!"

"Jane," said my grandmother, "I mustn't be worried; my nerves won't stand it. I sha'n't be here long, and you know what I have promised you."

"Whose servant am I—yours or hers?"

"Mine, Jane, and a very good servant you've been. I hope for your own sake you are not going to be different now."

"Haven't I served you faithfully?" asked Jane Painter, sobbing herself into a quieter emotional stage.

"Yes, Jane, yes; and you shall be remembered for it."

"Haven't I waited on you hand and foot?"

"Yes, Jane, yes; and you shall be remembered."

“When you was took bad with the spasms,” blubbered Jane, “didn’t I stop up with you all night till I was fit to drop?”

“Yes, Jane; and I haven’t forgotten you for it. You shall be remembered, I tell you.”

By being remembered, my grandmother meant that Jane Painter should be set down in her will for a certain portion of the contents of her long stocking; and but for this inducement it was pretty clear that Jane Painter would have taken her departure. The war she waged against us from this time was passive, but bitter. I, as the recognised heir to the long stocking, and as being likely, therefore, to diminish her portion, came in for the largest share of her ill-temper and animosity, and she showed much ingenuity in devising means to torment me. Parting my hair on the wrong side, brushing it into my eyes, rubbing the soap in my mouth and only half-wiping my face after I was washed, buttoning my clothes awry, running pins into me, holding me suspended by one arm as we

went down stairs ; these were the smallest of my sufferings. An incident, laughable in itself, but exceedingly painful in its effect upon me, comes vividly to my remembrance here ; and it afforded Jane Painter an opportunity of inventing a new torture, and of inflicting upon me the sharpest and most terrible distress I ever experienced. It occurred in this way :

Whether it was that the dull companionship of a peevish old woman was having its due effect upon me, or whether it sprang from my natural constitution, I was growing to be very nervous. I was frightened of being alone in the dark ; a sudden noise startled me painfully ; any unusual exhibition of tenderness brought tears to my eyes. One bright summer afternoon I was sitting with my grandmother. Everything about me was very quiet ; my grandmother had not spoken for a long time, and I listened to the regular sound of her breathing which told me she was asleep. I tried all kinds of devices to while away the time. I looked at the wall and traced the

pattern of the paper; I tried to stare the monkey-man on the mantelshelf out of countenance; I closed my eyes and placed the tips of my forefingers on them, and then opened them to assure myself that the world had not come to an end; I counted the rise and fall of my grandmother's capacious bosom till I grew so confused that the billows before me seemed to swell and fill the room. There was no pleasure to be gained from any of these tasks, and I felt weary and dispirited. The sunshine streaming in at the parlour-window seemed to say, "Why are you stopping in that dull room? Come out and play." I gazed wistfully at the light, and thought how nice it would be outside. I felt that I *should* like to go. But I knew from rueful experience how cross my grandmother would be if I made a noise and awoke her; and I was so tightly fixed in my little arm-chair that I could not extricate myself without a struggle. I dared not attempt to wrench myself free from its embrace in the room; it might fall to the

ground. There was nothing for it but to try and escape from the room with the chair fixed to me. The sunshine grew brighter and brighter, and more and more tempting. My grandmother really seemed to be fast asleep. I stretched out my hand and touched her dress: she always dressed in silk, and sat in state. Her steady breathing continued. I coughed, and whispered, "Grandmother!" but she did not hear. I spoke more loudly. "Grandmother!" There was no response, and then I thought I would venture. I rose, with my chair attached to me—the firmest and closest of friends—and crept slowly and softly out of the room into the passage. There I released myself, and then ran out into the sunshine. In a glow of delight I flitted about like a butterfly escaped from prison. I was in the full height of my enjoyment, when turning my head over my shoulder, I saw my long ungainly shadow following me, and in sudden unreasoning fright I ran away from it. I screamed in terror as I saw it racing fast at my heels, as

if trying to leap upon me and seize me, and my mother happening at that moment to come to the street-door, I flew towards her in a paroxysm of terror, and, clutching tight hold of her, hid my face in her gown. In that position my mother, with soothing words, drew me into the house, and I was only pacified by being assured that the "black man" who had frightened me had disappeared; and certainly, when I was persuaded to look around I saw no trace of him. My grandmother, awakened by my screams, did not fail to give me a solemn lecture for my bad behaviour in stealing from the room, and she improved the occasion by making me tremble with new fears by her dreadful prophecies as to what the "black man" would do to me if I dared to be naughty again. The incident had a serious effect upon me, and I was ill for a week afterwards. The doctor who was attending my father said that I was of a peculiarly sensitive temperament, and that great care must be taken of me.

“The nervousness,” he said, “which has been the cause of his fright may, if not counteracted, produce bad results by-and-by. The lad’s nature is essentially womanly and delicate. None the worse for that — none the worse for that.”

He laid his hand upon my head in a very kind manner, and tears rushed to my eyes. Seeing these, he immediately removed his hand, and gave my cheek a merry pinch.

“He will grow out of it?” questioned my mother, anxiously.

“Oh, yes,” was the reply, cheerfully uttered, “he will grow out of it; but you must be careful with him. Don’t let him mope; give him plenty of exercise and fresh air.”

“I should like a pony,” I said.

My mother’s troubled eyes sought the floor. If she could only have seen a magic pumpkin there!

“Then,” continued the doctor, “until he is older and stronger I would fill his mind with cheerful fancies. Tell him as many stories as you please of fairies, and prin-

cesses, and flowers, and such like ; but none about ghosts. You would like to hear about beautiful fairies rising out of flower-bells, and sailing in the clouds, and floating on the water in lilies, would you not, my lad ? ”

I nodded gaily ; his bright manner was better than all the medicine.

“ Do they really do all these things, sir ? ”

“ Surely ; for such as you, my boy. ” I clapped my hands. “ You see ! ” he said to my mother.

Many a time after this did my mother ransack her mental store, and bring forth bright-coloured fancies to make me glad. She told Jane Painter what the doctor said, and asked her to tell me the prettiest stories she knew. Jane Painter replied with one of her sweetest smiles. It was part of her duties to put me to bed every night, and one night, soon after I was well, she came into my room in the dark, as I was lying half awake and half asleep. She crept up the stairs and into the room so stealthily that I had no conscious-

ness of her presence until a sepulchral voice stole upon my ears saying,—

“Ho! Mister Friar, Don’t be so bold, For fear you should make My ’eart’s blood run cold!”

My heart’s blood did run cold at these dreadful words, and I uttered a cry of fright. Then Jane Painter spoke in her natural tone.

“I knew a boy once, and his name was Namby-Pamby. He was the greatest coward that ever breathed, and he was always telling tales. I know what happened to him at last. You’re like him. Perhaps it’ll happen to you. A fine boy you are! You ought to have been born a rabbit. I suppose you’ll tell your mother. All cowards do.” Here she must have put her head up the chimney, for her voice sounded very hollow as she repeated, “Ho! Mister Friar, Don’t be so bold, For fear you should make My ’eart’s blood run cold!”

I cannot describe my terror. I wrapped the counterpane tightly round my head, and lay all of a tremble until Jane Painter thought

fit to take her departure. From that night she inflicted the most dreadful tortures upon me. The first thing she did after putting me to bed was to blow out the candle ; then she would calmly sit down and tell me frightful stories of murders and ghosts. Blood was her favourite theme ; she absolutely revelled in it, and to this day I cannot look upon it without a shudder. She would prowl about the room, muttering,

“I smell blood ! I smell blood !”

And then,

“Let him be alive, Or let him be dead,
I'll have his blood to make my wine, I'll
grind his bones to make my bread.”

After that she would grind her teeth, and make sounds as though she were drinking.

“Serve him right, too, the little coward !
Grind his bones On two large stones. His
blood and brine I'll drink for wine.”

I suffered this martyrdom in silence. I would not tell my mother, as all cowards did. What the effect on me would have been if circumstances had allowed Jane Painter to

continue her persecution I am afraid to think; but fortunately for me the event occurred which she was waiting for. My grandmother died very suddenly. The last words she was heard to utter were, "Poor Anthony!" I was not sorry when she died. I tried to look sad, as everybody else looked, but I knew that I was a dreadful hypocrite.

CHAPTER III.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S LONG STOCKING.

THERE was a friend of the family of whose name I have no remembrance, and whom, from a certain personal peculiarity, I must denominate Snaggleteooth. He was a large man—very tall, and round in proportion—with a glistening bald head, a smooth full-fleshed face, and clear grey eyes. In repose, and when he was not speaking, he was by no means an unpleasant-looking man; his face was benignant, and his clear grey eyes beamed kindly upon you. But directly he smiled he became transformed, and his features were made to assume an almost fiendish expression by reason of a hideous snaggle-tooth which thrust itself forward im-

mediately he opened his mouth. It stuck out like a horn, and the change it effected in his appearance was something marvellous.

As the friend of the family, Snaggletooth came forward and offered his assistance. My father being confined to his bed by sickness, there was no man in the house to look after the funeral of my grandmother, and Snaggletooth's services were gladly accepted. I fancy that he was fond of funerals, from the zealous manner in which he attended to the details of this and a sadder one which followed not long afterwards. Setting this fancy aside, he proved himself a genuine and disinterested friend. We had no near relatives ; my mother was an only daughter, and my father had but one brother, older than he, whom I had never seen, and who had disappeared from the place many years ago. He was supposed to be dead ; and from certain chance words which I must have heard, I had gained a vague impression that he was not a credit to the family.

It was a strange experience for me to sit

in my grandmother's room after her death, gazing at her empty arm-chair. I could not keep away from the room; I crept into it at all hours of the day, and sat there trembling. I mentally asked the stone monkey-figure what it thought of my grandmother's death, and I put my fingers in my ears lest I should hear an answer. Jane Painter found me there in the evening when she came to put me to bed, and stated that my grandmother's ghost was present, and that she was in communication with it. She held imaginary conversations with the ghost in the dusk, speaking very softly and waiting for the answers. The effect was ghastly and terrifying. These conversations related to nothing but poor me, and the exquisite pain Jane Painter inflicted upon me by these means may be easily imagined.

The first thing Snaggletooth did after my grandmother's funeral was to search for her long stocking and the treasures it was supposed to contain. Taking the words in

their literal sense, I really thought that the long stocking would be found hidden somewhere—under the bed, perhaps, or among the feathers, or up the chimney—stuffed with money, in shape resembling my grandmother's leg, which I knew, from actual observation, to be a substantial one.

“Perhaps she made a will,” observed Snaggletooth to my mother.

Jane Painter was present, hovering about us with hungry jealous eyes, lest she should be cheated.

“She did make a will,” said Jane Painter, “and I'm down in it.”

“Then we will find it,” said Snaggletooth, cheerfully.

My grandmother's desk was opened, and every piece of paper in it was examined. No will was there, nor a word relating to it. Her trunk was searched with a like result.

“Never mind,” said Snaggletooth, with a genial smile, “we shall be sure to find the old lady's long stocking.”

And he set to work. But although a rigid search was made, no long stocking could be found. Snaggleteooth became immensely excited. Very hot, very dusty and dirty, and with his shirt sleeves tucked up to his shoulders, he gazed at vacancy, and paused to take breath. Disappointed as he was up to this point, his faith in my grandmother's long stocking was not shaken; he had it not, and yet he saw it in form as palpable as the lisle-thread stockings of my grandmother, which were scattered about the room. A closer and more systematic search was commenced. The hunt became more and more exciting, and still not a glimpse of the fox's tail could be seen. Under Snaggleteooth's instructions the bedstead was taken down, the pillows and mattresses were ripped open (Snaggleteooth being determined not to leave a feather unturned), the posts were sounded, to discover if they were hollow, and the strictest examination was made of every vestige of my grandmother's clothing, without a satisfactory result. Dirtier and hotter than ever, and

covered with fluff and feathers, Snaggletooth looked about him with an air of "What next?" His eye fell upon my grandmother's arm-chair. Out came the stuffing. That it contained, and nothing more. My grandmother's footstool: a like result. Her portly pincushion: nothing but bran. Up came the carpet, and almost blinded us with dust. And then Snaggletooth sat down in the midst of the wreck, and said disconsolately,

"I am afraid we must give it up."

So it was given up, and the mystery of my grandmother's long stocking took honourable place in the family records as an important legend for ever afterwards.

Jane Painter passed through many stages of emotion, and ended by being furious. She vowed—no, she swore; it is more appropriate—that she had been robbed, and openly declared that my mother had secreted my grandmother's long stocking, and had destroyed the will. Nay, more; she screamed that she had seen the treasure, which consisted of new Bank of England notes and a heap of gold, and that

in the will my grandmother had left her three hundred pounds.

“Woman !” exclaimed Snaggletooth, rising from the ruins, “be quiet !”

“Woman yourself !” screamed Jane Painter. “You’re in the plot to rob a poor girl, and I’ll have the law of you ; I’ll have the law, I’ll have the law !”

“Take it and welcome,” retorted Snaggletooth. “I hate it.”

But he was no match for Jane Painter, and he retired from the contest discomfited ; did not even stop to wash his face.

My mother was sad and puzzled. I did not entirely realise at the time the cause of her sadness, because I did not know how poor she really was, but I learnt it afterwards. She gathered sufficient courage to tell Jane Painter that of course she could not stop in the house after what she had said.

“If every hair in your head was a diamond,” gasped Jane Painter, “I wouldn’t stop ! No, not if you went down on your bended knees ! I’ll go to-morrow.”

Then she pounced upon two silk dresses and some other articles of clothing, and said that my grandmother had given them to her. My mother submitted without a word, and Jane Painter marched to her room and locked them in her box. She did as much mischief as she could on her last evening in our house ; broke things purposely and revenged herself grandly on poor little me. After undressing and putting me to bed as usual, and after smelling about the room, and under the bed, and up the chimney for blood, she imparted to me the cheerful intelligence that my grandmother's ghost would come and take me away exactly at twelve o'clock that night. Near to our house was a church, and many a night had I lain awake waiting for the tolling of the hour ; but I had never listened with such intensity of purpose as I listened on this night. As midnight drew near, I clenched my fists, I bit my lips, I drew my knees almost up to my nose. I trembled and shook in the darkness. I would not look, I thought ; and when the hour tolled, every note was

charged with terrible meaning, and I shut my eyes tighter and held my breath under the clothes. But when the bell had done tolling, my state of horrible curiosity and fear compelled me to peep out, and there in the middle of the room stood a tall figure in white. So loud and shrill were my hysterical cries that my mother ran into the room, there to find Jane Painter in her night-dress. I think the woman herself, fearful lest she had gone too far, was glad to quit the house the following day without being called to account for her misdeeds. She did not leave without a few parting words. She called us all a parcel of thieves, and said that a judgment would fall upon us one day for robbing a poor servant of the money her dead mistress had left her.

CHAPTER IV.

I MURDER MY BABY-BROTHER.

MISFORTUNES never come singly, and they did not come singly to us. It was not for us to give the lie to a proverb. Often in a family death is in a hurry when it commences, and takes one after another quickly; then pauses for a long breath.

In very truth, sorrow in its deepest phase had entered our house, and my mother's form seemed to shrink and grow less from the day she put on mourning for my grandmother. But if my mother had her troubles, I am sure I had mine; and one was of such a strange and terrible nature that, even at this distance of time, and with a better comprehension of things, a curiously-reluctant feeling comes

upon me as I prepare to narrate it. It is summarised in a very few words. I murdered my baby-brother.

At least, such was my impression at the time. For a long while I was afflicted by secret remorse and by fear of discovery, and never till now have I made confession. There was only one witness of my crime : our cat. I remember well that my father was said to be sinking at the time, and my mother, having her hands full, and her heart, too, poor dear ! placed me and my baby-brother in the room in which I used to sit with my grandmother. My task was to take care of the little fellow, and to amuse him. He was so young that he could scarcely toddle, and we had great fun with two oranges which my mother had given us to play with. It required great strength of mind not to eat them instead of playing with them ; but the purpose for which they were given to us had been plainly set down by my mother. All that I could hope for, therefore, was that they might burst their skins after being knocked about a little, when of course

they would become lawful food. We played ball with them ; my baby-brother rolling them towards me, not being strong enough to throw them, and I (secretly animated by the wish that they would burst their skins) throwing them up to him, with a little more force than was actually necessary, and trying to make him catch them. I cannot tell how long we played, for at this precise moment of my history a mist steals upon such of my early reminiscences as are related in this and the preceding chapters—a mist which divides, as by a curtain, one part of my life from another. My actual life will soon commence, the life that is tangible to me, as it were, that stands out in stronger colour and is distinct from the brief prologue which was acted in dreamland, and which lies nestled deep among the days of my childhood. Cloud-memories these ; most of us have such. Some are wholly bright and sweet, some wholly sad and bitter, some parti-coloured. When the dreamland in which these cloud-memories have birth has faded, and we are in the summer or the

winter of our days, fighting the Battle, or, having fought it, are waiting for the trumpet-sound which proclaims the Grand Retreat, we can all remember where we received such and such a wound, where such and such a refreshing draught was given to us, at what part of the fight such and such a scar was gained, and at what part a spiritual vision dawned upon our souls, captivating and entrancing us with hopes too bright and beautiful ever to be realised; and though our blood be thin and poor, and the glory of life seems to have waned with the waning of our strength, our pulses thrill and our hearts beat with something of the old glow as the remembrance of these pains and pleasures comes upon us!

To return to my baby-brother. The dusk steals upon us, and we are still playing with the oranges. The cat is watching us, and when an orange rolls in her direction, she, half timidly, half sportively, stretches out her paw towards it, and on one occasion lies full length on her stomach, with an

orange between the tips of her paws, and her nose in a straight line with it. I hear my baby-brother laugh gleefully as I scramble on all-fours after the orange. The dusk has deepened, and my baby-brother's face grows indistinct. I throw the orange towards him. It hits him in the face, and his gleeful laughter changes to a scream. I absolutely never see my baby-brother again, and never again hear his voice. All that afterwards refers to him seems to be imparted to me when it is dark, and so strong is my impression of this detail that in my memory I never see his face with a light upon it. My baby-brother is taken suddenly ill, I am told. I go about the house, always in the dark, stepping very gently, and wondering whether my secret will become known, and if it does, what will be done to me. Still in the dark I hear that my baby-brother is worse: that he is dangerously ill. Then, without an interval as it seems, comes the news that my baby-brother is dead, and I learn in some undiscoverable way that he has died of the croup. I know

better. I know that I gave him his death-blow with the orange, and I tremble for the consequences. But no human being appears to suspect me, and for my own sake I must preserve silence. Even to assume an air of grief at my baby-brother's death might be dangerous; it might look as if I were too deeply interested in the event; so I put on my most indifferent air. There are, however, two things in the house that I am frightened of. One is our old Dutch clock, the significant ticking and the very ropes and iron weights of which appear to me to be pregnant with knowledge of my crime. Five minutes before every hour the clock gives vent to a whirring sound, and at that sound, hitherto without significance, I tremble. There is a warning in it, and with nervous apprehension I count the seconds that intervene between it and the striking of the hour, believing that then the bell will proclaim my guilt. It *does* proclaim it; but no person understands it, no one heeds it. I lean against the passage wall, listening to

the denunciation. Snaggletooth comes in and stands by my side while the clock is striking. I look up into his face with imploring eyes and a sinking heart. He taps my cheek kindly, and passes on. I breathe more freely; he does not know the language of the bells. The other thing of which I am frightened is our cat. I know that she knows, and I am fearful lest, by some mysterious means, she will denounce me. If I meet her in the dark, her green eyes glare at me. I try to win her over to my side in a covert manner by stroking her coat; but as I smooth her fur skilfully and cunningly, I am convinced that she arches her back in a manner more significant than usual, and that by that action she declines to be a passive accessory to the fact. Her very tail, as it curls beneath my fingers, accuses me. But time goes on, and I am not arrested and led away to be hanged. When my baby-brother is in his coffin I am taken to see him. The cat follows at my heels; I strive to push her away stealthily

with my foot, but she rubs her ear against my leg, and will not leave me. I do not see my baby-brother, because I shut my eyes, and I sob and tremble so that they are compelled to take me out of the room; but I have a vague remembrance of flowers about his coffin. I am a little relieved when I hear that he is buried, but the night that follows is a night of torture to me. The Dutch clock ticks, "I know! I know!" and the cat purrs, "I know! I know!" and when I am in bed the shade of Jane Painter steals into the room, and after smelling about for blood, whispers in a ghastly undertone that *she* knows, and is going to tell. Of the doctor, also, I begin to be frightened, for after his visit to my father's sick-room, my mother brings him to see me—being anxious about me, I hear her say. He stops and speaks to me, and when his fingers are on my wrist, I fancy that the beating of my pulse is revealing my crime to him.

But more weighty cares even than mine are stirring in our house, and making them-

selves felt. My father's last moments are approaching, and I hear that he cannot last the day out. He lasts the day out, but not the night. As the friend of the family, Snaggleteeth remains in the house to see the end of his old comrade. He and my father were schoolboys together, he tells me.

"He was the cleverest boy in the school," Snaggleteeth says; "the cleverest boy in the school! He used to do my sums for me. We went out birds'-nesting together; and many and many's the time we've stood up against the whole school, snowballing. A snowball, with a stone in it, hit him in the face once, and knocked him flat down; but he was up in a minute, all bloody, and rushed into the middle of our enemies, like a young lion—like a young lion! He was the first and the cleverest of all of us—I was a long way behind him. And now, think of him lying there almost at his last breath, and look at me!" Snaggleteeth straightens himself as he walks upstairs, murmuring,

“The cleverest boy in the school! And now think of him, and look at me!”

Snaggleteeth’s wife is in the house, and helps my mother in her trouble. In the night this good creature and I sit together in the kitchen—waiting. My mother comes in softly two or three times; once she draws me out of the kitchen on to the dark landing, and kneels down, and with her arms around my neck, sobs quietly upon my shoulder. She kisses me many times, and whispers a prayer to me, which I repeat after her.

“Be a good child always, Chris,” she says.

“I will, mother.” And the promise, given at such a time, sinks into my heart with the force of a sacred obligation.

Then my mother takes me into the kitchen, and gives me into the charge of Snaggleteeth’s wife, and steals away. Snaggleteeth’s wife begins to prattle to amuse me, and in a few minutes I ascertain that she in some way resembles Jane Painter; for—probably influenced by the appropriateness of the occasion

for such narrations—she tells me stories in a low tone about the Ghost of the Red Barn, and the Cock Lane Ghost, and Old Mother Shipton. The old witch is a favourite theme with Snaggletooth's wife, and I hear many strange things. She says,

“One night Mother Shipton was in a terrible rage, and she told the grasshopper on the top of the Royal Exchange to jump over to the ball on St. Paul's Church steeple. And so it did. Soon after that, London was burnt to the ground.”

I muse on this, and presently inquire, “Was it an accident?”

“The fire? No; it was done on purpose.”

“Was it because the grasshopper jumped on to the steeple that London was set on fire?”

“Of course,” is the reply. “That was Mother Shipton's spite.”

Snaggletooth's wife tells so many stories of ghosts and witches that the air smells of fire and brimstone, and I see the cat's tail

stiffen and its eyes glow fearfully. Then I hear a cry from upstairs, and Snaggleteeth's wife rises hurriedly, and looks about her with restless hands, and the whole house is in a strange confusion. Snaggleteeth himself comes into the room, and as he whispers some consoling words to me—only the import of which I understand—his great tooth sticks out like a horn. He looks like a fiend.

CHAPTER V.

I PLAY THE PART OF CHIEF MOURNER.

NOTWITHSTANDING her limited means, my mother had always managed to keep up a respectable appearance. Popular report had settled it that my grandmother was a woman of property and that my father had money; and the fact that my grandmother's long stocking had proved to be a myth was most completely discredited. We are supposed, therefore, to be well to do, and the scandal would have been great if my father had not received a respectable funeral. Public opinion called for it. My mother makes a great effort, and quite out of love, I am sure, and not at all in deference to public opinion, buries my father in a manner

so respectable as to receive the entire approval of our neighbours. Public opinion called for mutes, and two mutes—one with a very long face and one with a very square face—are at our door, the objects of deep and attentive contemplation on the part of the sundry and several. Public opinion called for four black horses, and there they stand, champing their bits, with their mouths well soaped. Public opinion called for plumes, and there they wave, and bow, and bend, proud and graceful attendants at the shrine of death. Public opinion called for mock mourners, and they are ready to parody grief, with very large feet, ill-fitting black gloves, and red-rimmed eyes, which suggest the idea that their eyelids have been wept away by a long course of salaried affliction. Never in all his life had my father been so surrounded by pomps and vanities; but public opinion has decided that on such solemn occasions grief is not grief unless it is lacquered, and that common decency would be outraged by following the dead to the grave with simple humility.

The interior of our house has an appearance generally suggestive of graves and coffins. The company is assembled in the little parlour facing the street—my grandmother's room—and in her expiring attempt at respectability my mother has provided sherry and biscuits. The blinds are down although it is broad day; a parody of a sunbeam flows through a chink, but the motes within it are anything but lively, and float up and down the slanting pillar in a sluggish and funereal manner, in perfect sympathy with the occasion. The cat peeps into the room, debating whether she shall enter; after a cautious scrutiny she decides in the negative, and retires stealthily, to muse over the uncertainty of life in a more retired spot. The company is not numerous. Snaggleteeth is present, and the doctor, and two neighbours who approve of the sherry. These latter invite Snaggleteeth's attention to the wine, and he pours out a glass and disposes of it with a sadly resigned air; saying before he drinks it, with a tender reference to my father as he holds it up to the light,

“Ah! If *he* could!” Conversation is carried on in a deadly-lively style. I think of my baby-brother, and a wild temptation urges me to fall upon my knees and make confession of the murder; but I resist it, and am guiltily dumb. Snaggleteeth, observing signs of agitation in my face, pats me on the shoulder, and says, “Poor little fellow!” The two neighbours follow suit, and poor-little-fellow me in sympathising tones. After this, they approached the decanter of sherry with one intention. There is but half a glass left, which the first to reach the decanter pours out and drinks, while the second regards him reproachfully, with a look which asks, On such an occasion should not self be sacrificed? Before the lid of the coffin is fastened down, I am taken into the room by Snaggleteeth to look for the last time upon my father’s face. I see nothing but a figure in white which inspires me with fear. I cling close to Snaggleteeth. He is immensely affected, and mutters, “Good-bye, old schoolfellow! Ah, time! time!” As I look up at him, his

bald head glistens as would a ball of wax, and something glistens in his eyes.

When the coffin is taken out of the house, there is great excitement among the throng of persons in the street. They peep over each other's shoulders to catch a glimpse of the coffin and of me. I cannot help feeling that I am in an exalted position. A thrill of pride stirs my heart. Am I not chief mourner?

I stand by the side of a narrow grave, dug in a corner of the churchyard, and shaded from the sun's glare by a triangular wall, the top of which is covered with pieces of broken bottles, arranged with cruel nicety and precision, so that their sharp and jagged ends are uppermost. Standing also within the shadow of the triangular wall are a number of tombstones, some fair and white, others yellow and crumbling from age, which I regard with the air of one who has acquired a vested interest in the property. I do not understand the words the clergyman utters, for he has an impediment in his speech.

But as the coffin is lowered, I am impelled gently towards the grave, from which I shrink, however, apprehensive lest I shall be thrust into it, and buried beneath the earth which is scattered on the coffin with a leaden miserable sound. When the service is ended, I hear Snaggleteeth mutter, "Think of him lying there, and look at me! And we were schoolfellows, and played snowball together!" Snaggleteeth shows me my grandmother's grave, and the grave of my baby-brother. I dare not look upon the latter, knowing what I know. Then Snaggleteeth, still with head uncovered, stands before a little grave over which is a small marble tombstone, with the inscription, "Here Lieth our Beloved Daughter." Seeing that his tears are falling on the grave, I creep closer to him, and he presses me gently to his side. I read the inscription slowly, spelling the words, "Here Lieth our Beloved Daughter," and I look at him inquiringly.

"My daughter," he says; "the sweetest angel that ever breathed. She was three

years and one day old when she died, nearly five years ago. Poor darling! Five years ago! Ah, time! time!”

As we pass out of the churchyard I notice again the broken glass on the top of the wall, and I say, “Isn’t that cruel?”

“Why cruel?” asks Snaggletooth.

“No one can get in without hurting himself.”

Snaggletooth regards me with an eye of curiosity.

“And who do you think wants to get into such a place, my little fellow?”

I do not answer, and Snaggletooth adds,

“The angels, perhaps. Good—good. But they come in another way.”

“No one can get out without hurting himself,” I suggest.

“That is a better thought; but if they live good lives——”

“Yes, sir.”

“Stone walls covered with broken glass won’t hurt them.”

Snaggletooth looks upwards contemplatively.

I look up also, and a sudden dizziness comes upon me and overpowers me. Snaggletooth catches me as I am falling.

“You are not well, my little fellow.”

“No, sir; I feel very weak, but the doctor says I shall get over it.”

Snaggletooth lifts me in his arms, and I fall asleep on his shoulder as he carries me tenderly home.

Here we are, my mother and I, sitting in the little parlour. My mother has been crying over me, and perhaps over the sad future that lies before us. Not a sound now is to be heard. My condition is a strange one. Everything about me is very unreal, and I wonderingly consider if I shall ever wake up. All my young experiences come to me again. I see my grandmother and myself sitting together. There upon the mantelshelf is the figure of the smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone, wagging his head at me; there is the man with the knob on the top of his head—what is his name? Anthony—yes, Anthony Bullpit—making a meal off his

finger nails. In marches my grandmother's long stocking, bulged out with money to the shape of a very substantial leg, just as I had fancied it—that makes me laugh; but my flesh creeps as I hear Jane Painter's voice in the dark, telling of blood and murder. The last word, as she dwells upon it, brings up my baby-brother, and I hear the Dutch clock tick: "I know! I know!" But it ticks all these fancies into oblivion, and ticks in the picture of the churchyard. I see the graves and the tombstones, and I read the inscription: "Here Lieth our Beloved Daughter." How it must grieve her parents to know that their beloved daughter is lying shut up in the cold earth! I raise a portrait of the child, with fair hair and laughing eyes, and I wonder how she would look now if she were dug up, and whether her parents would know her again. Night surprises me confined within the triangular wall of the churchyard. The gates are closed, and I cannot pass out. The moon shines down icily. The cold air makes my fevered blood

hotter. I *must* get out! I cannot stop confined here for ever! I dig my fingers into the wall; desperately I cling to it, and strive to climb. Inch by inch I mount. With an exquisite sense of relief I reach the top, but as I place my hands upon it they are cut to the bone by the broken glass, and with a wild shudder I sink into darkness and oblivion!

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH A GREAT CHANGE IN MY
CIRCUMSTANCES TAKES PLACE.

WHEN I recovered from the fever of which the experiences just recorded were the prelude, I found that we had removed from the house in which I was born, and that we were occupying apartments. We had removed also from the neighbourhood; the streets were strange, the people were strange; I saw no familiar faces. Hitherto we had been living in Hertford, and many a time had I watched the barges going lazily to and fro on the River Lea. The place we were in now was nothing but a village; my mother told me it was called Chipping Barnet. I cannot tell exactly what it was that restrained

me from asking why the change had been made ; it must have been from an intuitive consciousness that the subject was painful to my mother. But when, after the lapse of a year or so, we moved away from Chipping Barnet, and began to live in very humble fashion in two small rooms, I asked the reason.

“My dear,” said my mother, “we cannot afford better.”

I looked into her face ; it was pale and cheerful. But I saw, although no signs of repining were there, that care had made its mark. She smiled at me.

“We are very poor, dear child,” she said ; and added quickly, with a light in her eyes, “but that is no reason why we should not be happy.”

She did her best to make me so, and poor as our home was, it contained many sweet pleasures. By this time I had completely lost sight of Snaggletooth and all our former friends and acquaintances. I did not miss them ; I had my mother with me,

and I wished for no one else. Already, my former life and my former friends were becoming to me things of long ago. My mother often spoke of London, and of her wish to go there.

"I think it would be better for us, Chris," she said.

"Is London a very large place?" I asked. "As large as this?" stretching out my arms to gain an idea of its extent.

My mother told me what she knew of London, which was not much, for she had only been there once, for a couple of days, and I said I was sure I should not like it; there were too many people in it. My idea of perfect happiness was to live with my mother in some pretty country place, where there were fields and shady walks and turnstiles and narrow lanes, and perhaps a river. I described the very place, and artistically dotted it with lazy cattle listening for mysterious signs in earth or air, or looking with steady solemn eyes far into the horizon, as if they were observing signs hidden from

human gaze. I also put some lazy barges on the river: "Creeping, creeping, creeping," I said, "as if they were so tired!"

"And we would go and live in that very place, my dear," said my mother, "if we had money enough."

"When you get money enough, mother, we *will* go."

"Yes, my dear."

Other changes were made, but not in the direction I desired. Like a whirlpool, London was drawing us nearer and nearer to its depths, and by the time I was twelve years of age we were nearly at the bottom of the hill down which we had been steadily going. My clothes were very much patched and mended now; all our furniture was sold, and we were living in one room, which was rented to us ready furnished. The knowledge of the struggle in which my mother was engaged loomed gradually upon me, and distressed me in a vague manner. We were really now in London, although not in the heart of the city; and my mother,

whose needle brought us bread and very little butter, often walked four miles to the workshop and four miles back on a fruitless errand. Things were getting worse and worse with us. My mother grew thinner and paler, but she never looked at me without a smile on her lips—a smile that was often sad, but always tender. At night, while she worked, she taught me to read and write; there was no free school near us, and she could not afford to pay for my learning. But no schoolmaster could have taught me as well as she did. She had a thin, sweet voice, and often when I was in bed I fell asleep while she was singing by my side. I used to love to lie thus peacefully with closed eyes, and float into dreamland upon the wings of her sweet melodies. I woke up sometimes late in the night, and saw her dear face bending over her work. It was always meek and cheerful; I never saw anger or bad passion in it.

“Mother,” I said one night, after I had lain and watched her for a long time.

She gave a start. "Dear child ; I thought you were asleep."

"So I have been ; but I woke up, and I've been watching you for a long, long time. Mother, when I am a man I shall work for you."

"That's right, dear. You give me pleasure and delight. I know my good boy will try to be a good man."

"I will try to ; as good as you are. I want to be like you. Could I not work now, mother ?"

"No, dear child ; you are not strong enough yet."

"I wish I could grow into a strong man in a night," I thought.

My mother came to the bedside, and rested her fingers upon my neck. What tenderness dwells in a loving mother's touch ! I imprisoned her fingers in mine. She leant towards me caressingly, and kissed me. Sleep stole upon me in that kiss of love.

I saw a picture in a shop window of a girl whose bright fresh face brought my

mother's face before me. But the girl's face was full of gladness, and her cheeks were glowing; my mother's cheeks were sunken and wan. Still the likeness was unmistakably there, and I thought how much I should love to see my mother as bright as this bright girl. I spoke to her about it, and she went to see the picture, which was in the next street to ours. She came back smiling.

"It *is* like me, Chris," she said; "as I was once."

"Then you must have been very, very pretty," I said, stroking her cheek.

My mother laughed melodiously.

"When I was young, my dear," she said with innocent vanity, blushing like a girl, "I was thought not to be ugly."

"Ugly, indeed!" I exclaimed, looking around defiantly. "My mother couldn't be ugly."

"What do you call me now, Chris?"

"You are beautiful — beautiful!" with another defiant look. My mother shook her hand in mild remonstrance. "You are—you

are! But you're pale and thin, and you've got lines here—and here." I smoothed them with my hand. "And, mother, you're not old!"

"I'm forty, Chris."

"That is not old. Tell me—why did you alter so?"

"Time and trouble alter us, dear. We can't be always bright."

I thought that I might be the trouble she referred to, and I asked the question anxiously.

"You, my darling!" she said, drawing me to her side and petting me. "You are my joy, my comfort! I live only for you, Chris—only for you!"

I noticed something here, and with a touch of that logical argumentativeness for which I was afterwards not undistinguished, I said,

"If I am your joy and comfort, you ought to be glad."

"And am I not glad? What does my little boy mean by his roundabouts?"

"You cried when you said I was your joy and comfort."

“They were tears of pleasure, my dear—tears that sprang from my love for my boy. Then, perhaps, they sprang from the thought—for we will be truthful always, Chris—that I should like to buy my boy a new pair of boots and some new clothes, and that I couldn’t because I hadn’t money enough.”

“You would buy them for me if you had money?”

“Ah! what would I not buy for my darling if I had money!”

How delicious it was to nestle in her arms as she poured out the love of her heart for me! How I worshipped her, and kissed her, and patted her cheek, and smoothed her hair!

“You are like a lover, my dear,” she said.

“I am your lover,” I replied, and murmured softly to myself, “Wait till I am a man! wait till I am a man!”

That night I coaxed my mother to talk to me of the time when she was young, and she did, with many a smile and many a blush; and in our one little room there was much delight. She picked out the daisies.

of her life, and laid them before me to gladden my heart. Simple and beautiful were they as Nature's own sweet flower. She showed me a picture of herself as a girl, and I saw its likeness to the picture I had admired in the shop window. She sang me to sleep with her dear old songs, full of sweetness and simplicity. How different are our modern songs from those sweet old airs! The charm of simplicity is wanting—but, indeed, it is wanting in other modern things as well. The spirit of simplicity dwells not in crowded places.

Then commenced my first conscious worship of woman. I held her in my heart as a devotee holds a saint. How good was this world which contained such goodness! How sweet this life which contained such sweetness! She was the flower of both. Modesty, simplicity, and truth, were with her invariably. To me she became the incarnation of purity.

Time went on, and low as we were we were still going down hill steadily and

surely. It is a long hill, and there are many depths in it. Work grew slack, and in the struggle to make both ends meet, my mother was frequently worsted; there was often a great gap between. I do not wonder that hearts sometimes crack in that endeavour. Yet my mother ("by hook and by crook," as I have heard her say merrily) generally managed in the course of the week to scrape together some few coins which, jealously watched and jealously spent, sufficed in a poor way to keep body and soul together. How it was managed is a mystery to me. The winter came on: a hard winter. Bread went up in price; every additional halfpenny on a four-pound loaf was a dagger in my mother's breast. We rubbed through this hard time somehow, and Christmas glided by and the new year came upon us. A cold spring set in, and work, which had been getting slacker and slacker, could not now be obtained. Still my mother did not lie down and yield. She tried other shops, and received a little work

—very little—at odd times. Then came a very hard week, and my mother was much distressed. On the Friday night I heard her murmuring to herself in her sleep as I thought, and I fancied I heard her sob. I called to her, but she did not answer me. Her breath rose and fell in regular rhythm. Yes, she was asleep, and the sob I thought I heard was born of my fancy. I was thankful for that.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH A FAIRY IN A COTTON-PRINT DRESS
IS INTRODUCED.

THE next day was Saturday, and my mother went out early in the morning, and returned at two o'clock with the saddest of faces.

"No work, mother?" I asked.

"No, my dear," she replied; "but come, my child, you must be hungry."

There was little enough to eat, but my boy's appetite, and the cunning way my mother had of placing our humble fare before me, made the plain food as sweet as the best.

I noticed that she ate nothing, and I tried to persuade her to eat.

"I have no appetite, my dear," she said,

and added in reply to my sorrowful look, "My little boy doesn't know what I've had while I was out this morning."

Deeper thought than usual seemed to occupy her mind during the afternoon, and she suddenly started up, and hurriedly threw on her bonnet and shawl.

"Are you going to try again, mother?"

"Yes, my darling; I must try again."

It was late when she returned, and it gladdened me inexpressibly to see a happy change in her; she was almost radiant as she took my face between her two hands, and said as she kissed me,

"Child, dear child! God bless those who help the poor!"

She did not bid me repeat the words; but some deep meaning in her voice impelled me to do so, and I said in a solemn tone, which the words seemed to demand,

"God bless those who help the poor!"

She nodded pensively as she knelt before me, and as I looked at her earnestly her face flushed, and she rose and bustled about the

room, putting things in order. I think she tried to hide her face from me, and that her bustling about was a pretence.

“And now, Chris,” she said presently, drawing her breath quickly, as though she had been running, “let us go out and get something nice for supper, and for dinner to-morrow. Put on your cap, dear; you must be hungry.”

I was; and I was glad, indeed, to hear the good news, and to accompany her on such an errand. She consulted me as to what she should buy, and made me very proud and happy with her “What do you say to this, dear?” and “Would you like this, my darling?” We returned home loaded with meat, potatoes, and one or two little delicacies. I was in a state of great satisfaction, and we made quite merry over the trifling incident of a few potatoes rolling out of my mother’s apron down the stairs in the dark. “Bump, bump, bumping,” I said, as I scrambled down after them, “as if they knew their way in the dark, and could see without a candle.”

“Potatoes have eyes, my dear,” said my mother; and we laughed blithely over it.

My mother’s mood changed after supper. We always said a very simple grace after meals. It was, “Thank God for a good breakfast!” “Thank God for a good dinner!” or whatever meal it was of which we had partaken. Our “Thank God for a good supper!” being said, most earnestly by my mother, she cleared away the things, and said,

“Now we will see how rich we are.”

We sat down at the table, side by side, and my mother took out of her pocket what it contained. I thought that our all money had been expended in our frugal purchases, but I was agreeably mistaken. There were still left two sixpences and a few coppers. My mother selected a battered halfpenny, and regarded it tenderly—so tenderly, and with so much feeling, that her tears fell on it. I wondered. A battered halfpenny, dented, dirty, bruised! I wondered more as she kissed it, and held it to me to kiss.

“Why, mother?” I asked, as I kissed.

In reply, she told me a story.

“My dear, there lived in a great forest a poor woman who had no friend in the world but one—a bird that she loved with all her heart and soul, and who, not being big enough or strong enough to get food for himself, depended, because he couldn’t help it, upon what this poor woman could provide for him. There were other birds that in some way resembled the bird that belonged to this poor woman and that she loved so dearly, and many of these were also compelled to wander about the great forest in search of food; but they found it so difficult to obtain sufficient to eat, and they met with so many sad adventures in their search, that their wings lost their strength, and their hearts the brightness that was their proper heritage—for they were young birds whose time for battling with the world had not arrived. The poor woman did not wish her dear bird to meet with such sad experiences until he was strong and able to cope with them. I

can't tell you, my dear, how much she loved her bird, and how thoroughly her whole heart was wrapped up in her treasure. Once she had friends who were good to her; but it was the will of God that she should lose them, and she and her bird were left alone in the world. She had many difficulties to contend with, being a weak and foolish woman——”

I shook my head, and said, “I am sure she wasn't; I am sure she wasn't!” My mother pressed me closer to her side, and continued, her fingers caressing my neck,

——“And the days were sometimes very dark for her, or would have been but for the joy she found in her only treasure. A time came when her heart almost fainted within her—for her bird was at home hungry, and there was no food in the nest, and she did not know which way to turn to get it. She wandered about the forest with rebellious thoughts in her mind—yes, my dear, she did!—and out of her blindness and wickedness, she began almost to doubt the good-

ness of God. She thought, foolish woman that she was ! that there was no love in the forest but the love which filled *her* breast ; that pity, compassion, charity, had died out of the world, and that she and her bird were to be left to perish. But she received such a lesson, my dear, as she will never forget till her dying day. While these despairing thoughts were in her mind, and while her rebellious heart was crying against the sweetest attributes with which God has endowed His children, a fairy in a cotton-print dress came to her side——”

“ Mother ! ”

“ It is true, my dear. A fairy in a cotton-print dress came to her side, and with a sweet word and a sweeter look put into her hand a talisman—call it a stone, my dear, if you will—a common, almost valueless piece of stone ; and the touch of the pretty little fairy fingers to the poor woman’s hand was like the touch of Moses’s rod to the rock, when the waters came forth for the famished people. And she prayed God to forgive her

for doubting His goodness, and the goodness of those whom He made in the image of Himself. Then, as she looked at the common piece of stone which the fairy had given to her, she saw in it the face of an angel, and she kissed it again and again, as I do this !”

After a little while my mother wrapped the halfpenny in a piece of paper, and put it by, saying she hoped she would never be compelled to spend it.

During the whole of the following week my mother was unsuccessful in obtaining work. It was not from want of perseverance that she did not succeed, for she came home every day weary and footsore.

“The sewing-machines are keeping many poor women out of work,” she said.

“Then they are bad things,” I exclaimed ;
“I wish they were all burnt !”

“No, my dear ; they are good things ; they are blessings to many poor creatures. Why, Chris, if I had one, we should be quite rich !”

But she did not have one, and her needles were at a discount, so far as earning bread for us was concerned. On the Saturday she went out again early, and did not come home until late at night. Good fortune had again attended her, and she brought home a little money.

“Have you seen the fairy in the cotton-print dress?” I asked gaily.

My mother nodded sorrowfully.

“Saturday’s a lucky day, mother,” I said, rubbing my hands.

“Yes, my child,” she answered, with a heavy sigh.

She added another halfpenny to the one she had kissed and put by last week, and we went out again to make our purchases. Another week followed, and another, with similar results and similar incidents. Then my mother fell sick, and could not, although she tried, keep the knowledge of her weakness from me; a sorrow of which I was not a sharer was preying on her heart. I did not know of it; but I saw that my mother

was growing even paler and thinner, and often, when she did not think I was observing her, I saw the tears roll down her cheek, and her lips quiver piteously. Friday night found us with a cupboard nearly empty, and with but one halfpenny in our treasury—the first battered and bruised halfpenny which my mother hoped she would never be compelled to spend. Those she had added to it had gone during the week. She looked at it wistfully :

“Must we spend it, Chris?”

“Is the angel’s face there?” I asked.

“Yes, I see it.” And she kissed the battered coin again.

“Then we must keep it,” I said stoutly.

When I awoke the next morning, my mother was kneeling by my bedside, and when she saw my eyes resting on her face, she clasped me in her arms, and so we lay for fully half an hour, without a word being spoken. There was a little milk left for breakfast, and this my mother made into very weak milk-and-water. The bread she cut

into four slices. One she ate, two she gave to me, and one she put into the cupboard. She laid the battered halfpenny on the mantel-shelf.

“Now, Chris,” she said, as she put on her poor worn bonnet, “when you are hungry you can eat the slice of bread that’s in the cupboard; and if I am not at home before you are hungry again, you can buy some bread with that halfpenny. Kiss me, dear child.”

“But, mother,” I remonstrated, “you are too ill to go out. You ought to stay at home to-day.”

“I dare not, child; I *must* go out! Why, doesn’t my Chris want his supper to-night, and his dinner to-morrow? And don’t I want my supper and dinner, too?”

“Are you going to the workshop, mother?”

“I am going that way, child?”

But I begged her to promise that she would try and be home early, and she was compelled to promise, to satisfy me. With faltering steps she left the room, and walked slowly

down-stairs. I felt that there was something wrong, but I did not understand it, and certainly would have been powerless to remedy it. I was soon hungry enough to eat the slice of bread; and then I went out, and strolled restlessly about the streets. It was a cold day, and I was glad to get indoors again, although there was no fire. In the afternoon I was hungry again, and mother had not returned. Should I spend the halfpenny? I took it from the mantel-shelf. The gift of a fairy in a cotton-print dress! I turned it this way and that, in the endeavour to find some special charm in it. It was as common a halfpenny as I had ever looked upon. I saw no angel's face in it. But my mother said there was, and that was enough. No; I could not spend it. Then I thought that it was unkind of me to let my mother, ill and weak as she was, go out by herself. I reproached myself; I might have helped her on. She promised to return soon; perhaps she was not strong enough to return. These reproachful thoughts and my

hunger grew upon me, and my uneasiness increased, until I became very wretched indeed. As dusk was falling, I made up my mind that a certain duty was before me. I must walk into the city to the shop for which my mother used to work, and seek for her. I had been to the place two or three times to take work home, and I knew my way pretty well. Perhaps I should meet my mother on the road. Off I started on my self-imposed task. My increasing hunger made the distance appear twice as long as it really was, and I could not help lingering and longing for a little while at a fine cookshop, the perfume which pervaded it being more fragrant to me at the time than all the perfumes of Arabia would have been. When I arrived at the workshop, it was closed. There was nothing for it but to turn my face homeward. Weary, hungry, and dispirited, I commenced my journey back; I was anxious to get home quickly now, to lessen the chance of my mother returning while I was absent. In my eagerness and

confusion I missed my way, and it was quite ten o'clock at night when I found myself in a street which was familiar to me, and which I knew to be about two miles from the street in which we lived. The neighbourhood in which I was now was a busy one ; a kind of market was held there every Saturday night, in which poor people could purchase what they required a trifle cheaper than they could be supplied at the regular shops. There were a great glare of lights and a great hurlyburly of noise which in my weak condition confused and frightened me. I staggered feebly on, and stumbled against a man who was passing me in a great hurry. He caught hold of my arm with such force as to swing me round ; and without any effort on my part to escape, for I was almost unconscious, I slipped from his grasp and fell to the ground. I think I heard the words, " Unmanly brute !" uttered in a female voice ; but my next distinct remembrance is that I was standing on my feet, swaying slightly, and held up by the man I had run

against. He spoke to me in sharp tones, and demanded to know where I was running to. I begged his pardon humbly, but in tones too faint to reach his ear, for he inquired roughly if I had a tongue in my head. There were a few persons standing about us, and one or two women told the man he ought to be ashamed of himself, and asked him what he meant by it, and why he didn't leave the boy alone. In sneering reply he called them a parcel of wise women.

"Did you ever see a thief of his size?" he asked.

"I am not a thief," I said, in a faint tone.
"Let me go. I want to get home."

I raised my eyes to his face as I spoke. I could not distinguish his features, for everything was dim before me, but he seemed to see something in my face that occupied his attention, for he looked at me long and earnestly.

"Have you been ill?"

"I am tired and hungry. Let me go, please," I implored.

He released his hold of me. Glad to be free, and intent only on getting home as soon as I could, I walked from him with uncertain steps. But I did not know how weak I really was ; and I was compelled to cling to the shop-fronts for support. I must have stumbled on in this way for fifty or sixty yards, when I stopped to rest myself. Then, without raising my eyes, I knew that the man against whom I had stumbled was standing by me again ; he must have followed me out of his course, for when we first met his road was different from mine.

“Did you see me following you?” he asked.

I was frightened of him ; his voice seemed to hurt me. I had scarcely a comprehension of the meaning of his words ; and I was fearful that, if I disputed anything he said, I might arouse his anger, and that he would detain me again. He repeated his question ; and I answered, almost without knowing what I said,

“Yes, sir.”

My reply appeared to dissatisfy him.

“Then you have been shamming weakness?”

“Yes, sir.”

I looked about me timidly and nervously for a means of escape. Standing in the road, close to the kerbstone, and facing a portion of the pavement which was partly in shade, was a beggar-woman, with her face hidden on her breast. One hand held her thin shawl tightly in front of her; the other hand was held out supplicatingly. What it was that caused me to fix my eyes on her I cannot tell; perhaps it was because I recognised in her drooping form and humble attitude something kindred to my own pitiable condition. As I gazed at her, a little girl, very poorly dressed, and with a basket on her arm, stopped before the woman, and put a coin into her outstretched hand. The woman curtsied, and stooped and kissed the little girl. As the child, her act of charity performed, walked away, I saw her face; and it was so sweet and good, that my mother's

words with reference to the battered half-penny came to my mind: "I see an angel's face in it." I watched her until she was lost in the throng; and then I turned to the beggar-woman again, and saw, as in a flash of light, my mother! Was it shame, was it joy, that convulsed me, as crying, "Mother! mother!" I ran and fell senseless at her feet?

CHAPTER VIII.

A POSTMAN'S KNOCK.

IT seemed as though I had closed my eyes and opened them with scarcely a moment's interval ; and yet I was at home in our own little room, and my mother was bending over me tenderly. I could not immediately realise the change. The busy streets and the glare in them, and my fear of the man who had accused me of being a thief, were still present to my mind. I clung closer to my mother.

“What is my darling frightened of ?” she said soothingly. “He is at home, and safe in his mother's arms.”

“At home !” I looked around apprehensively. “Where's the man ?”

“What man, dear child? The man who carried you home?”

I had no remembrance of being carried home.

“The man who carried me home!” I exclaimed; and repeated wonderingly, “Carried me home! No, I don’t know him.”

“There is no one here, dear child, but you and I. Taste this.”

She held a cup of tea to my lips, and I drank gratefully; and ate a slice of bread-and-butter she gave me.

“There, my dear! My darling feels better, does he not?”

“Yes.” As I looked at her, the scene I had witnessed, of which she had been the principal figure, dawned upon me. I could not check my sobs; I felt as if my heart would burst. “Oh, mother! mother!” I cried. “I remember now; I remember now!”

She held me in her arms, and caressed me, and pressed me to her heart. My tears flowed upon her faithful breast.

“How did you find me, dear child? Un-

kind mother that I am to leave my darling hungry and alone all the day!"

"Don't say that, mother. You mustn't; you mustn't! If anybody else said it, I would kill him!"

"Hush, dear child! You must not excite yourself. Come, you shall go to bed; and you shall tell me all in the morning, please God."

"No, I want to tell you now; I want to talk to you now. I want to lie here, and talk quietly, quietly! Oh, but I am so sorry! so sorry!"

"For what, dear child?"

Through my sobs I murmured, "That you should have to stand in the cold, and beg for me!" My arms were round her, and I felt her shrink and tremble within them.

"Now I know what the poor woman in the forest did when she went to look for food for her bird. If any one saw you that knew you, would you not be ashamed? Would you not run away?"

Sadly and tearfully she replied, "No, my

own darling, I do not think I should. Who would be so cruel as to say I ought to be ashamed of doing what I do?"

"But, mother, you stand with your head down, as if you wanted to hide your face!"

The blood rose to her face and forehead pitifully.

"I cannot help it, dearest," she said with trembling lips; "it comes natural to me to stand so. I do not think of it at the time. And oh, Chris! don't despise your poor mother now that you have discovered her secret!"

She would have fallen at my feet, but that I, dimly divining her intention, held her tightly to me. In the brief pause that ensued before she spoke again, I closed my eyes, and leant my head upon her shoulder, the better to think of her goodness to me. I saw all the details of the picture which now occupied my mind. I saw my mother approach the spot where she had decided to stand, to solicit charity for me; I saw her hesitate, and tremble, and look around warily

and timidly, as though she were about to commit a crime; and then I saw her glide swiftly into the road and take her station there, with her dear head drooping on her breast from shame. Yes, from shame. And it was for me she did this!

“If I could get work to do,” she presently said, in low meek tones, such as one who was crushed and who despaired might use if wrongfully accused, “I would not beg. Heaven knows I have tried hard enough; I have implored, have almost gone on my knees for it, in vain. What was I to do? We could not starve, and I would not go to the parish; I would not bring that shame upon my darling’s life, until everything else in the world had failed. I did not intend my child to know. I tried to keep the knowledge from him—I tried, I tried! Oh, my dear boy! my heart is fit to break!”

I listened in awe, and could say no word to comfort her.

“It is no shame to me to do as I have done,” she said half appealingly, half defiantly.

“It is for bread for my dear child’s life. I should stand with my face open to the people, if I had the courage. But I am a coward—a coward! and I shrink and tremble, with terror in my heart, as though I were a thief!”

She a coward! Dear heart! Brave soul! Her voice grew softer.

“And oh, Cris, my child! since I have stood there I have learnt so much that I did not know before. It has made me better—humbler. Never again, never again can I doubt the goodness of God! What good there is in the world of which we are ignorant, until sorrow brings us to the knowledge of it! When I first stood there, the world seemed to pass away from me, so dreadful a feeling took possession of me. In my fancy, harsh voices clamoured at me, cruel faces mocked me from all sides; I did not dare raise my head. But in the midst of my soul’s agony soft fingers touched mine, and the sweet voice of a child brought comfort to my heart. And then poor women gave, and I was ashamed to take. I held it out to

them again, begging them with my eyes to take it back again ; and they ran away, some of them."

The floodgates of my mother's heart were open, and she was talking now as much to herself as to me, recalling what had touched her most deeply.

"Two weeks ago a young woman came and stood before me. God knows what she was thinking of as she stood there in a way it made my heart ache to see ! She was very, very pretty ; very, very young ! She stood looking at me so long in silence that I began almost to be afraid. I dared not speak to her first. I have never yet spoken unbidden in that place ; I seem to myself to have no right to speak. But, seeking to soften any hard thought she may have had in her mind for me or for herself, I returned her look, kindly I hope, and pityingly too. 'I thought I'd make you look at me,' she said in a hard voice that I felt was not natural to her ; 'beggars like you haven't much to be proud of, I should say. Thank the Lord I haven't

come to that yet!’ I tried to shape an answer, but the words wouldn’t leave my lips, and I could only look at her appealingly. Poor girl! she seemed to resent this, and tossed her head, and went away singing. But there was no singing in her heart. I followed her with my eyes, and saw her stop at a public-house; but she hesitated at the door, and did not enter. No; she came back, and stood before me again. ‘What do you come here for?’ she asked, after a little pause. ‘For food,’ I answered. She sneered at my answer, and I waited in sorrow for her next words. ‘Have you got a husband?’ ‘No,’ I said, wondering why she asked. ‘No more have I,’ she said. My thoughts wandered to a happier time, and pictures of brighter days which seem to have passed away for ever came to my mind; but the girl soon brought me back to reality. ‘Are you a mother?’ she asked. ‘Oh, yes!’ I answered, with a sob of thankfulness, for the dear Lord has made my boy a blessing to me. ‘So am I,’ she said, with a little laugh that struck me like

a knife. 'Here—take this; I was going to spend it in drink;' and she put sixpence in coppers into my hand, and ran away. But I ran after her, and entreated her to take the money back; but she would not, and grew sullen. I still entreated, and she said, 'Very well; give it to me; I'll spend it in gin.' What I said to her after this I do not know, I was so grieved and sorry for her; but I told her I would keep the money, and she thanked me for the promise, oh! so humbly and gratefully, and began to cry so piteously and passionately, that my own sorrows seemed light compared with hers. I drew her away to a quiet street, and kissed her and soothed her, and although we had never met before, she clung to me, and blessed me with broken words and sobs. Then, when she was quieter, I asked her where her little one was, and might I go with her and see it? She took me to her room, and I saw her baby—such a pretty little thing!—and I nursed it till it fell asleep, and then tidied up the room, and

put the bed straight. Ah, my darling! I could not repeat all that the poor girl said. I went out and spent fourpence of the sixpence she gave me in food for the baby, and she was not angry with me for it. I have been to see her and her baby twice since that night, and my heart has ached often when I have thought of them. If I were not as poor as I am, I would try to be a friend to them. But, alas! what can I do? Yet there is not a night I have stood in that place that I have not lifted my heart to God for the goodness that has been shown to me. How beautiful a thing it is for the poor to help the poor as they do! God sweeten their lives for them!"

We were silent for a long time after this. I broke the silence by whispering,

"Mother, I didn't spend the halfpenny; it is on the mantelshelf now."

"Dear child! I am sorry and glad. It is the first halfpenny I ever received in charity, and it was given to me by a little child."

"Let me look at it, mother."

She took it from the mantelshelf, and placed it in my hands.

"I can see the angel's face now," I said.

"It is the fairy in a cotton-print dress."

My mother nodded with a sweet smile.

"And the fairy is a little girl?"

"Yes, dear."

"And she came every Saturday night afterwards, with a basket on her arm, and gave you a halfpenny."

"Yes, dear. How do you know?"

"I saw her to-night, and I guessed the rest. I am so glad you kissed her! Mother, we will never, never spend this halfpenny!"

"Very well, my darling! but you haven't told me yet how it was you found me out."

I had barely finished my recital when a knock came at our door. On opening it, our landlady was discovered, puffing and blowing. A great basket was hanging from her hand. Benignant confidence in her lodger reigned in her face; curiosity dwelt

in her eye. As she entered, the air became spirituously perfumed.

“Oh, them stairs!” she panted. “They ketch me in the side! If you’ll excuse me, my dear!” And she sat down, still retaining her hold of the basket. She went through many stages before she quite recovered herself, gazing at us the while with that imploring look peculiar to women who are liable to be “ketched in the side.” Then she brightened up, and spoke again. “I thought I’d bring it up myself,” she said; “the stairs ain’t been long cleaned, and the boy’s boots are that muddy that I told him to wait in the passage for the basket. If you’ll empty it, I’ll take it down to him. Oh,” she continued, seeing that my mother was in doubt, “I don’t mind the trouble the least bit in the world! If all lodgers was as regular with their rent as you, my dear, I shouldn’t be put upon as I am!”

Still my mother hesitated; she did not understand it. I saw that the basket was well filled, for the lid bulged up. The land-

lady, declaring that it was very heavy, placed it on the table, and was about to lift the lid, when my mother's hand restrained her.

"There is some mistake; these things are not for me."

"Why, my dear creature!" exclaimed the landlady, growing exceedingly confidential, "didn't you order 'em?"

"No, I haven't marketed yet. My poor boy has been ill, and I haven't been able to go out."

"Well, but there can't be any mistake, my dear;" and the landlady, scenting a mystery, became [very inquisitive indeed; "here's your name on a bit of paper."

The writing was plain enough, certainly: "For Mrs. Carey. Paid for. Basket to be returned."

"Do you know the boy who brought them?" asked my mother.

"To be sure I do, my dear creature! He belongs to Mrs. Strangeways, the greengrocer round the corner."

“I should like to speak to him. May he come up?”

“Certainly, my dear soul!”

And the landlady, in her eagerness to get at the heart of the mystery, disregarded the effect of muddy boots on clean stairs, and called the boy up. But he could throw no light upon the matter. All that he knew was that his mistress directed him to bring the things round to Mrs. Carey's, and to make haste back with the basket. “And please, will you look sharp about it?” he adjured in a tone of injured innocence, digging his knuckles into his eyes, and working them round so forcibly that it was a wonder he did not gouge out his eye-balls; “if you keep me here much longer, missis 'll swear when I get back that I've been stopping on the road play to pitch and toss.”

The landlady, whose curiosity had now reached the highest point, protested that it would be flying in the face of Providence to hesitate another moment, and whipped open the basket.

“Half a pound of salt butter,” she said, calling out the things as she placed them on the table ; “half a pound of tea ; sixpennorth of eggs—they’re Mrs. Chizlett’s eggs, my dear, sixteen a shilling—I know ’em by the bag ; a pound of brown sugar ; a cabbage ; taters—seven pound for tuppence, my dear ; and a lovely shoulder of mutton—none of your scrag ! There !”

My eyes glistened as I saw the good things, and my mother was gratefully puzzled. The garrulous landlady stopped in the room for a quarter of an hour, placing all kinds of possible constructions upon the mystery, and inviting, in the most insinuating manner, the confidence of my mother, whom she evidently regarded as a very artful creature. It was sufficient for me that the food was lawfully ours, and I blessed the generous donor in my heart. On the following day my mother took me for a walk in the Park, and we arrived home in time to get the baked dish from the baker’s, which my mother had prepared. We had a grand dinner, and we fared tolerably

well during the week. On the Saturday, however, our cupboard and treasury were bare, and my mother was once more racked by those pin-and-needle anxieties which, insignificant as they seem by the side of matters of public interest, form the sum of the lives of hundreds of thousands of our fellow creatures. My mother watched me very nervously. I knew what was in her mind. She was striving to gather courage to bid me stop at home while she went out to beg. My heart was very full as, watching her furtively, I saw her put on her bonnet and shawl. Then she stood irresolutely by the mantelshelf. I crept to the side.

“Mother!”

“My child!”

“Let me go with you,” I implored.

“No, no, dear child! No, no!” she cried, and she knelt before me, and twined her arms around my neck. She was entreating me in the tenderest manner to stop at home, when the simplest thing in the world changed the current of our lives. A postman’s knock

was heard at the street-door, and a minute afterwards the landlady came running upstairs, almost breathless. My mother started to her feet. In one hand the landlady held a letter by the corner of her apron; the other hand was pressed to her side; and she panted as if her last moments had arrived.

“Oh, them stairs!” she exclaimed. “They’ll be the death of me! For you, my dear.” And she held the letter towards my mother.

A circumstance so unusual as the receipt of a letter threw us all into a state of excitement. It was certainly an event in my life. My mother was very agitated as she looked at the address, and the landlady took a seat, and waited in the expectation of hearing the news. But the letter was not opened until that worthy woman had retired, which she did in a very dignified, not to say offended, manner, as a proof that she had not the slightest wish—not she!—to pry into our private concerns.

“There’s no mistake, mother,” I said.

“No, my dear; it is addressed to me.”

Then, with great care, she opened the letter, and read aloud :

“14, Paradise Row, Windmill Street.

“EMMA CAREY,—Personally you will have not the slightest knowledge of me, for I do not think you ever set eyes on me; but you will know my name. I was not aware until a few days ago that your husband was dead. I am poor, but not as poor as you are. I offer you and your boy a home. You can both come and live with me, if you like. If you decide to come, you must not expect much. I am not a pleasant character, and my disposition is not amiable. But the probability is, if you accept my offer, that you and your boy will have regular meals, such as they are. I keep a shop; you can help me in it. You can come at once if you like—this very day. I don't suppose it will take you long to pack up.

“BRYAN CAREY.”

I started when I heard the name, for it was our own.

“It is from your uncle Bryan,” said my

mother; "your dear father's elder brother, who disappeared many years ago."

"I thought he was dead, mother."

"We all supposed so, never having heard from him."

"Was he nice, mother?"

"I have no idea, child; I never saw him. But he says that he is neither amiable nor pleasant."

Two words in the letter had especially attracted my attention.

"Regular meals," I murmured, somewhat timidly.

My mother rose instantly. Unless she accepted the offer, there was but one alternative before her; and no one knew better than I how her sensitive nature shrank from it. It was the bitterest necessity only that had driven her to beg.

"I will go at once and see your uncle, my dear. I don't know where Paradise-row is, but I shall be able to find it out. I will be back as soon as possible. Keep indoors, there's a dear child!"

She was absent for nearly three hours.

"Well, mother?" I said, running to the door as I heard her step on the stairs.

She drew me into the room, and sat down with an assuring smile on her lips.

"We will go, dear," she said, and my heart beat joyfully at the words. "It will be a home for us. Situated as we are, what would become of my dear child if I were to fall really ill? And I have been afraid of it many times. Yes, we will go. Your uncle Bryan keeps a grocer's shop. I told him I should have to give a week's warning here, and he gave me the money to pay the rent, so that we might go to him at once."

My mother looked about her regretfully. It belonged to her nature to become attached to everything with which she was associated, and she could not help having a tender feeling even for our one little room in which we had seen so much trouble.

"Now, Chris, we will pack up."

As uncle Bryan predicted in his letter, it

did not take us long. Everything we possessed went into one small trunk, and there was room for more when everything was in. The smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone—the precious relic I had inherited from my grandmother—had been carefully taken care of, and now lay at the bottom of the trunk. It had not brought us much luck, and I regarded it with something like aversion.

From the inscrutable eye of a landlady living in the house nothing can be concealed, and *our* landlady hovered in the passage divining (with that peculiar inspiration with which all of her class are gifted) that something important was taking place. My mother called her in, and paid her the week's rent in lieu of a week's notice. She was deeply moved, after the fashion of landladies (living in the house), when lodgers who have paid regularly take their departure. The fear of another lodger not so punctual in paying as the last harrows their souls. As my mother did not enter into particulars, not even mentioning to the landlady where

we were moving to, the inquisitive creature invited confidence by producing from a mysterious recess in her flannel petticoat a bottle of gin and a glass. My mother, however, declined to be bribed, much to the landlady's chagrin; after this she evidently regarded us with less favour.

"Uncle Bryan sent a boy with a wheelbarrow, Chris," said my mother, "to wheel your trunk home. He's waiting at the door now."

"*With* the wheelbarrow?" I asked gaily. I was in high spirits at the better prospect which lay before us.

"Yes, dear. *With* the wheelbarrow."

I could not help laughing, it seemed to me such a comical idea.

My mother cast an affectionate look at the humble room we were leaving for ever, and then we carried the trunk down to the street door, the landlady *not* assisting. There stood the boy with the wheelbarrow. The trunk was lifted in, and we marched away, the boy trundling the barrow,

we holding on in front, for fear the trunk should fall into the road. All the neighbours rushed into the street to look at the procession.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE BRYAN INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

THE boy took no notice of the neighbours, but wheeled straight through them, regardless of their legs. Neither did he take any notice of us, except by whistling in our faces. But he trundled the wheelbarrow cheerfully, and with an airy independence most delightful to witness. It was a long journey to Paradise Row, and it occupied a long time ; but the boy never flagged, never stopped to rest, although in the course of the journey he performed some eccentric antics. He was not as old as I, but he was much more strongly built. I envied him his strong limbs and broad shoulders. It was a cold day, and he was insufficiently clad ; his

toes peeped out of his boots, and his hair straggled through a hole in his cap, and a glimpse of his bare chest could now and then be seen through a rent in his waistcoat, which was made to serve the purpose of a jacket by being pinned at the throat; but the boy was not in the slightest degree affected by these disadvantages. The wind, which made me shiver, seemed to warm him, and he took it to his bosom literally with great contentment. His eyes were dark and bright, his nose was a most ostensible pug, and the curves of his large well-shaped mouth and lips spoke of saucy enjoyment. Indeed, he was full of life, noting with eager curiosity everything about him, and his dirty face sparkled with intelligence. As he drove the barrow before him, he whistled and sang without the slightest regard to nerves, and if any street lad accosted him jocosely or derisively, he returned the salutation with spirited interest. He appeared to be disposed to pause near the first organ-grinder we approached; but

he resisted the inclination, and after a short but severe mental struggle, he compromised matters by trundling the barrow three times round the unfortunate Italian, making a wider sweep each time. My mother remonstrated with him; but the boy, with the reins of command in his hand, paid no other attention to her remonstrance than was expressed in a knowing cock of his eye, implying that it was all right, and that he knew what he was about. For the safety of our trunk we were compelled to accompany him in his circular wanderings, and I felt particularly foolish as we swept round and round. But the third circle completed, the boy drove straight along again contentedly, whistling the last air the organ-grinder had played with such force and expression as to cause some of the passers-by to put their fingers to their ears. This manœuvre the boy conscientiously repeated with every organ-grinder we met on the road; repeated it also, very slowly and lingeringly, at a Punch-and-Judy show, afterwards conveying to the British public dis-

cordant reminiscences through his nose of the interview between Punch and the Devil ; and with supreme audacity repeated it when we came to a band of negro minstrels, proving himself quite a match for them when they threatened him with dreadful consequences if he did not immediately put a stop to his circular performance. Indeed, when one of the band advanced towards him with menacing gestures, he ran the wheelbarrow against the opposing force with such an unmistakable intention, that to save his legs the nigger had to fly. In this manner we came at length to the end of our journey.

I found Windmill Street to be a mere slit in a busy and bustling neighbourhood, and Paradise Row, where uncle Bryan lived, a distinct libel upon heaven, being, I fervently hope, as little like a thoroughfare in Paradise as can well be imagined. Uncle Bryan's shop was at the corner of Windmill Street and Paradise Row, and uncle Bryan himself stood at his street door, seemingly awaiting our arrival.

“Been loitering, eh?” was Uncle Bryan’s first salutation; sharply spoken, not to us, but to the boy.

“Never stopped wheelin’, so ’elp me!” returned the boy, in a tone as sharp as my uncle’s, yet with a doubtful look at my mother. “Never stopped to take a breathful of air from the blessed minute we started. Arks ’er.”

My mother, being appealed to by uncle Bryan, confirmed the boy’s statement, which was strictly correct, and, to his manifest astonishment, made no reproachful reference to his circular flights. His astonishment, however, almost immediately assumed the form of a satisfied leer.

“How much was it to be?” asked uncle Bryan, not at all satisfied with my mother’s assurance.

“Thrums,” replied the boy, readily. By which he meant threepence.

Uncle Bryan regarded him sourly.

“Say that again, and I’ll take off a penny.”

“Well, tuppence, then. I got to pay a

ha'penny for the barrer. What's a brown, more or less?"

The question was not addressed to any of us in particular, so none of us answered it. Uncle Bryan paid him twopence; and the boy, with never a "thank you," spun the coins in the air, and caught them deftly; then, with a wink at my mother as a trustworthy conspirator, he walked away with his empty barrow, whistling with all his wind at mankind in general.

Now, when uncle Bryan first spoke, I started. I thought it was not the first time I had heard his voice. It sounded to me like the voice of the man with whom I had the adventure on the previous Saturday night. The boy being out of sight, uncle Bryan turned to me.

"Why did you start just now?"

"I thought I knew your voice, sir," I said.

"Call me uncle Bryan. Knew my voice! It isn't possible, as you've never set eyes on me, nor I on you, till this moment."

This was intended to settle the doubt, and

I never again referred to it, although it remained with me for a long while afterwards. The trunk had been left on the door-step, and uncle Bryan assisted us to carry it upstairs to the bedroom allotted to us. A little bed for me—uncle Bryan made it over to me in three words—was placed behind a screen.

“I thought,” he said to my mother, “you would like your boy to sleep in the same room as yourself. The house is a small one, but we can find another place for him if you wish.”

“Thank you, Bryan,” replied my mother simply, “I would like to have him with me.”

Uncle Bryan was evidently no waster of words, and my mother entered readily into his humour.

“You must be tired,” he said, as he was about to leave the room; “rest yourself a bit. But the sooner you come down-stairs, the better I shall be pleased.”

My mother laid her hand on his arm, and detained him.

“Let me say a word to you, Bryan.”

“You will never repeat it!” he exclaimed, with a quick apprehension of what she wished to say.

“Never, without a strong necessity, Bryan.”

He laughed; but it was more like a dry husky cough than a laugh.

“When a man locks the street-door,” he said, “trust a woman to see that the yard-door’s on the latch.”

“I want to thank you, Bryan, for the home you have offered me and my boy.”

“Perhaps it won’t suit you.”

“It will suit us, Bryan, if it will suit you to allow us to remain.”

He seemed to chew the words, “allow us to remain,” silently, as if their flavour were unpleasant to him; but he said aloud,

“Wait and see, then.” And although my mother wished to continue the conversation, he turned his back to us, and abruptly left the room.

My mother sank into a chair; she must

have been very tired, for she had walked not less than twelve miles that day.

"You must be tired too, my dear," she said, drawing me to her side.

"Not so tired as you, mother."

"I don't feel very, very tired, my dear."

I knew why she said so; hope dwelt in her heart.

"I think your uncle Bryan is a good man," she said.

I did not express dissent; but I must have looked it.

"My dear," she said, answering my look, "you will find in your course through life that many sweet things have their home in the roughest shells. Uncle Bryan has a strange rough manner, but I think—nay, I am sure—he is a good man. Do you know, Chris, I believe those things that came home for us last Saturday night were sent by him. No, my dear, we will not ask him, or even speak of it. He will be better pleased if it is not referred to. And yet I wonder how he found us out!"

The room which was assigned to us was a back-room, small, and commonly but cleanly furnished. Immediately beneath the window was the water-butt, and beyond it were numbers of small back-yards—so many, indeed, that I wondered where the houses could be that belonged to them. The general prospect from this window, as I very soon learned, was composed of sheets, shirts, stockings, and the usual articles of male and female attire in the process of drying: of some other things also—of washing-tubs, and women and little girls wringing and washing, and up to their arm-pits in soap-suds. Occasionally I saw men also thus engaged. A variation in the prospect was sometimes afforded by small children being brought into the yards to be slapped and then set upon the stones to cool, and by other small children blowing soap-bubbles out of fathers' pipes. The peculiarity of the scene was that the clothes never appeared to be dried. They were eternally hanging on the lines, which intersected each other like

a Chinese puzzle, or were being skewered to them in a damp condition. I can safely assert that existence, as seen from our bed-room window, was one interminable washing day.

When we went down-stairs uncle Bryan was in the shop, weighing up his wares and attending to occasional customers. Attached to the shop were a parlour (in which the meals were taken and which served as a general sitting-room) and a smaller apartment in the rear. My mother called me into the smaller room.

“Do you see, Chris?” she said, pointing to some flowers on the window-sill.

There were two or three pots also, in which seeds had evidently been newly planted. In my mother’s eyes, these were a strong proof of my uncle’s goodness. A rickety flight of steps led to the basement of the house, in which there was a gloomy kitchen (very black-beetle-y), which could not have been used for a considerable time. The cobwebs were thick in the corners, and a prosperous spider, a very alderman in its

proportions, peeped out of its stronghold, with an air of "What is all this about?" The appearance of a woman in that deserted retreat did not please my gentleman; it was a sign of progress. In the basement were also two or three other gloomy recesses.

Our brief inspection ended, we ascended to the parlour. The fire was burning brightly, and the kettle was on the hob. My mother went to the door which led to the shop.

"At what time do you generally have tea, Bryan?" she inquired.

"At half-past five," he replied.

It was a quarter-past five by an American clock which stood in the centre of the mantelshelf. The clock was a common wooden one, with a glass door in front, on which was engraved a figure of Father Time with a crack down his back. One of his eyes was damaged, and his scythe also was mutilated; taking him altogether, as he was there represented, damaged and with cracks in him, old Father Time seemed by his disconsolate appearance to be of the opinion that it was

high time an end was made of *him*. Without more ado, my mother opened the cupboard, and finding everything there she wanted, laid the table, and prepared the meal. Exactly at half-past five uncle Bryan came in, and we had tea. He did not express the slightest approval of my mother's quickness, nor did she ask for it; and when tea was over, he went into the shop again, and my mother cleared up the things. She asked him about to-morrow's dinner, and took me with her to market with the money he gave her. While we were looking about us we came across the boy who had wheeled our trunk in the barrow. He was standing with others listening to a hymn which was being sung by two men and a woman. One of the men was blind, and he played on a harmonium, while his companions sang. He joined in also, having a powerful voice, and I thought the performance a very fine one.

The boy saw us; approached my mother, and said in a tone of strong approval,

“You’re a brick. I say, we sold old Bryan, didn’t us?”

My mother could not help smiling, which heightened the favourable opinion he had of her.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

My mother explained that she was going to market.

“I’ll show you the shops,” he said; and his offer was accepted.

He proved useful, and took us to the best and cheapest shops, and gave his candid opinion (generally unfavourable) of the articles my mother purchased. When the marketing was finished, he volunteered to carry the basket, and did not leave us until we were within a yard or two of uncle Bryan’s shop. He enlivened the walk with many quaint and original observations, and when he had nothing to say he whistled. He took his departure with good-humoured winks and nods. Upon my mother counting out her purchases to uncle Bryan, and returning him the few coppers that were left, he said,

“We’ll settle things on Monday, Emma. You’ll have to take the entire charge of the house, and to keep the expenses down, and we’ll arrange a certain sum, which must not be exceeded. If anything is saved out of it, you can put it by in this box,” pointing to a stone money-box shaped like an urn, which was on a shelf. “You can do anything you like to the place, but don’t disturb my flower-pots.”

“What have you planted in the new pots, Bryan?”

“Some of the new Japan lilies; they’ll not flower till summer. Don’t touch them; you don’t understand them.”

My mother was very busy that night, dusting and cleaning, and I think I never saw her in a happier mood. Now and then she went into the shop, and stood quietly behind the counter, noting how uncle Bryan attended to his business. He took not the slightest notice of her; did not address a single word to her. Once she came bustling back, with an air of importance. “I’ve

served a customer, Chris!" she said glee-fully.

Uncle Bryan's shop was stocked with small supplies of everything in the grocery line, and in addition to these he sold a few simple medicines for clearing the blood—some of them, I afterwards learned, of his own concoction and mixing. Friday was the day fixed for the preparation and making-up of these medicines, Saturday being the great night for the sale of the mixtures to working people, who purchased them in halfpenny and penny doses. I discovered that uncle Bryan's pills were famous in the neighbourhood. I calculated that on this Saturday night he must have served at least fifty customers with his medicines. The little parlour presented quite a different appearance when my mother had finished cleaning and dusting. I, not being quite satisfied with uncle Bryan's seeming indifference to my mother's desire to please him, looked for some expression of approval in his face when he came in to partake of a bread-and-cheese supper; but I

saw none. During the night my thoughts wandered to the little girl who had given the first halfpenny to my mother. I spoke about her.

“Do you think she will be sorry or glad, mother, because she will not see you to-night?”

“Sorry, I think, Chris; she will fancy I am ill.”

“But this is a great deal better, mother.”

“Infinitely better, dear child; and remember, we owe it all to uncle Bryan.”

Neither my mother nor I felt at all strange in our new home, and I slept as soundly as if I had lived in the house for years. Before we went to bed, we had a delicious ten minutes' chat; the storm in our lives which had lasted so long, and which had threatened to wreck us, had cleared away, and a delightful sense of rest stole into our hearts.

On the Sunday no business was done. After breakfast, uncle Bryan brought his account-book into the parlour, and busied himself with his accounts, adding up the

week's takings, and calculating what profit was made. My mother asked him if he was going to church.

"I never go to church," was his reply.

My mother looked grieved, but she entered into no argument with him.

"You have no objection to our going?" she said timidly.

"What have I to do with it? I dictate to no one. If you think it right to go to church, go."

"Is there one near, Bryan?"

"Zion Chapel isn't two minutes' walk."

Uncle Bryan asked no questions when we returned, and the day passed quietly. He devoted the evening to smoking and reading. My mother did not like the smoke at first, but it was not long before she schooled herself to fill uncle Bryan's pipe for him. So, with a pair of horn spectacles on his nose, and his pipe in his mouth, uncle Bryan read and enjoyed his leisure. Occasionally he took his pipe from his mouth, and read a few words aloud. At one time he became

deeply engrossed in a book which he took from a shelf in the shop, and he read the following passage aloud :

“That the consciousness of existence is not dependent on the same form or the same matter is demonstrated to our senses in the works of the Creator, as far as our senses are capable of receiving that demonstration. A very numerous part of the animal creation preaches to us, far better than Paul, the belief in a life hereafter. Their little life resembles an earth and a heaven, a present and a future state ; and comprises, if it may be so expressed, immortality in miniature.”

“Immortality in miniature !” repeated my mother, in a puzzled tone. “What is that from, Bryan ?”

“The ‘Age of Reason,’” he answered.

There was a long pause, broken again by uncle Bryan’s voice :

“If we consider the nature of our condition here, we must see there is no occasion for such a thing as revealed religion. What is it we want to know ? Does not the

creation, the universe we behold, preach to us the existence of an Almighty Power, that governs and regulates the whole? And is not the evidence that this creation holds out to our senses infinitely stronger than anything we can read in a book that any impostor might make and call the word of God? As for morality, the knowledge of it exists in every man's conscience."

Presently he laid the book aside, and my mother took it up. Uncle Bryan stretched forth his hand with the intention of keeping it from her; but he was too late. He gazed at her furtively from beneath his horn spectacles, as she turned over the pages. After a few minutes' inspection of the book she returned his gaze sadly, and, with a protecting motion, drew me to her side. I had not liked uncle Bryan's laugh, and I liked it less now.

"Chris, my dear child," said my mother, in a tone of infinite tenderness, "go upstairs and bring down my Bible."

I did as she desired, and my mother

caressed me close, with her arm round my waist. Uncle Bryan sat on one side of the fire-place, reading the "Age of Reason"; my mother sat on the other side, reading the Bible.

CHAPTER X.

OUR NEW HOME.

A DAY or two afterwards I surprised my mother and uncle Bryan in the midst of a conversation which I supposed had reference to myself. My mother was in a very earnest mood, but uncle Bryan, except that he listened attentively to what she was saying, seemed in no way stirred. In all my life's experiences I never met or heard of a man who was more thoroughly attentive to every little detail that passed around him than was uncle Bryan; but although he gave his whole mind to the smallest matter for the time being, he evinced no indication of it, and persons who did not understand his character might reasonably have supposed

him to be utterly indifferent to what was going on.

“You will promise me, Bryan,” my mother said.

“I will promise nothing, Emma,” he replied; “I made a promise once in my life, and I received a promise in return. I know what came of it.” He smiled bitterly, and added, his words seeming to me to be prompted more by inner consciousness than by the signs of distress in my mother’s face, “But you can make your mind easy. It is not in my nature to force my views upon any one. Force! as if it were any matter of mine! What comes to him must come as it has come to me—through the light of experience.”

“Do you not believe, Bryan——”

He interrupted her, almost vehemently. “I believe in nothing! If that does not content you, I cannot help it.”

“If I could assist you, Bryan—if I could in any way relieve you——”

“You cannot. I am fixed. Life for me is tasteless.”

Something of desolation was in his tone as he said this, but its plaintiveness was not designed by the speaker. Rather did he intend to express defiance, and a renunciation of sympathy.

"But, Bryan," said my mother, with a tender movement towards him——

"I must stop you," he said, "for fear you should say something which would compel an explanation from me. Let matters rest. I am but one among hundreds of millions of crawlers. Once I saw other than visible signs—or fancied that I saw them, fool that I was! The time has gone, never to return; the power of comprehension has gone, never to return. You must take me as you find me. There is very little in the world that I like or dislike; but I can heartily despise one thing: insincerity. Have you anything more to say?"

"No, Bryan;" and I could see that my mother was both pained and relieved.

"I have; two or three words. A question first. You can be satisfied to remain here?"

"Yes, Bryan, if it satisfies you. I can do no better."

A gleam came into his eyes. "That is sincere," he said, with a pleasanter smile than the last. "Very well, then ; it does satisfy me. What I want to say now is, that there must be no break. You must not remain, and let me get accustomed to you, and then leave me for a woman's reason."

"I will not, Bryan."

With that, the conversation ended. In the night, when my mother and I were alone in our bedroom, I said,

"Do you think uncle Bryan is a good man now, mother?"

"Is it not good of him, Chris, to give us a home?"

"Yes," I said ; but I was not quite satisfied with her answer. "His shell is very rough, though."

My mother laughed. I loved to hear her laugh ; it was so different from uncle Bryan's. His laughter had no gladness in it.

“We shall find a sweet place here and there, Chris,” she said.

She tried to, I am sure, and she brightened the house with her pleasant ways. One night we were sitting together as usual; I was doing a sum on a slate which uncle Bryan had set for me; he was reading; my mother was mending clothes. We had been sitting quiet for a long time, when my mother commenced to sing one of her simple songs, very softly, as though she were singing to herself. In the midst of her singing she became aware that uncle Bryan was present, and with a rapid apprehensive glance at him she paused. He looked up from his book at once.

“Why do you stop, Emma?” he asked.

“I thought I might disturb you.”

“You do not; I like to hear you.”

The charm, however, was broken for that night, and my mother knew it, and sang but little. Two or three nights afterwards, when uncle Bryan was engrossed in his book, my mother began to sing again over her work. I knew every trick of her features, and I

think she was designing enough to watch her opportunity, for there was never a more perfect master than she of the delicate cunning which kindness to rough and cross natures often requires. It was with much curiosity that I quietly observed uncle Bryan's behaviour while my mother sang. He held his book steadily before him, but he did not turn a page; and to my, perhaps, too curious eyes there appeared to be, in the very curve of his shoulders, a grateful recognition of my mother's wish to please him. I could not see his face, but I liked him better at that time than I had ever yet done. Truly, my mother was right; here at least was one sweet place found in the rough shell. She continued her singing in the same soft strains; and often afterwards sang when we three were sitting together of an evening.

Exactly three weeks after we had taken up our quarters with uncle Bryan, my mother and I paid a visit to the neighbourhood in which she had made the acquaintance of the

fairy in the cotton-print dress ; but although it was Saturday night we saw no trace of the little girl. My mother was much disappointed ; and then she went to the house in which the young woman lived who had given her sixpence, and learned that she had moved, the landlady did not know whither. I was glad to get away from the neighbourhood, although I was almost as much disappointed as my mother was at not finding our little fairy.

Our new life, having thus fairly commenced, went on for a long time with but little variation. Uncle Bryan allowed my mother to do exactly as she pleased, and she, without in the slightest way disturbing his regular habits, made the house very different from what it was when she first entered it. Every room in it, down to the basement, where she did the cooking, was always sweet and clean. We also had flowers on the sill of our bedroom window, and their graceful forms and bright colours were a refreshing relief to the dark back wall.

It delights me to see the taste for *growing* flowers cultivated by the poor. Flowers are purifiers; they breed good thoughts. Quite a rivalry was established between uncle Bryan and my mother in the care and attention which they bestowed on their respective window-sills. It went on silently and pleasantly, and my mother was not displeased because uncle Bryan was the victor. He trained some creepers from the window of his little back room to the window of our bedroom, and my mother watched them with intense interest creeping up, and up, until they reached the sill. "They are like a message of love from your uncle, my dear," she said. It is by such small precious links as these that heart is bound to heart. Yet the feelings with which uncle Bryan inspired me were by no means of a tender nature. He made no effort to win my affection; as a general rule, his bearing towards me was sufficiently cold to check tender impulse, and the words, "I believe in nothing!" which I had heard him address sternly to

my mother, had impressed me very seriously. I regarded him sometimes with fear and aversion.

I was sent to a cheap school, a very few pence a week being paid for my education. My career in the school is scarcely worthy of record. All that was taught there were reading, writing, and arithmetic; and when these were learned our education was completed. The master never allowed himself to be tripped up by his pupils. Arithmetic was his strong point, and the rule-of-three was his boundary. In that happy hunting-ground we bought and sold the usual illimitable quantities of eggs, and yards of calico, and firkins of butter; and there we should have wallowed until we were old men, had we remained long enough, without ever reaching another heaven. My principal reminiscences of those days are connected with the bully of the school; who, whenever we met in the streets out of school-hours, compelled me to make three very low and humble bows to him before he

would allow me to pass. I have not the satisfaction of being able to record that he met with the usual fate (in fiction) of school bullies—that of being soundly licked, and of being compelled to eat humble pie for ever afterwards. He was a successful tyrant. His position occasionally compelled him to fight two boys at a time—one down, the other come up—but he was never beaten. A tyrant he was, and a tyrant he remained until I lost sight of him. In his career, virtue was never triumphant.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH I TAKE PART IN SOME LAWLESS EXPEDITIONS.

IN his letter which offered us a home, uncle Bryan had stated, truly enough, that he was a poor man. Although he purchased his stock in very small quantities, he often had as much as he could do to pay his monthly bills. I remember well a certain occasion when he was seriously perplexed in this way. My mother, who had been attentively observant of him during the day, said in the evening,

“You are troubled, Bryan.”

“I am short of money, Emma,” he replied; and he went on to say that he had to pay Messrs. So-and-So and So-and-So to-morrow,

and that his last week's takings were two pounds less than he had reckoned upon.

"How much short are you, Bryan?"

He adjusted his horn spectacles, and brought forward his account-book, and his file of bills, and every farthing the till contained. In a few minutes he had his trouble staring him in the face in black and white, in the shape of a deficit of two pounds eighteen shillings—a serious sum. My mother, with a grateful look in her eyes, produced the stone money-box, in which he had said she might put by anything she was able to save out of the money he gave her to keep house with. She shook it; what was in it rattled merrily. It was a hard job to get the coins out, the slit in the box was so narrow; but it was managed at last by means of the blade of a knife, and a little pile of copper and silver lay on the table. I think the three of us seated round the table would not make a bad picture; but then you could not put in my mother's delicious laugh. She had saved more than three pounds. I could scarcely tell

whether uncle Bryan was sorry or pleased. He bit his lips very hard, but said never a word ; and, taking the exact sum he required, he put the balance back into the box.

The chief difficulty uncle Bryan had to contend with in keeping his stock properly assorted was brown sugar. Indeed, brown sugar may be said to have been the bane of his life ; to me, it was a most hateful commodity, and I often wished there was not such an article in the world. Uncle Bryan had to pay ready money for sugar, and he could not purchase at the warehouse less than a bag at the time—about two hundred pounds weight, I believe. Sometimes he had not the money to go to the sugar market with, and the stock on the shelves had dwindled down almost to the last quarter of a pound. Then commenced a series of lawless expeditions which I remember with comical terror. One of the first instructions given by uncle Bryan to my mother had been, never, under any pretext, to serve even the smallest quantity of sugar to a strange customer unless he or she

purchased something else at the same time. The reason for this was that there was no profit on sugar; it was what was called a leading article in the trade, and by some mysterious trade machinations, arising probably out of the fever of competition, had come to be sold by the large grocers at exactly cost price. The small grocers, of course, were compelled to follow in the wake of the large ones; if they had not, their customers would have deserted them. Not only, indeed, did the small grocers make no profit on the sugar they sold, but, taking into consideration the draught necessary to turn the scale ever so little when weighing out quarter and half pounds, there was an absolute loss; even the paper in the scale would not make up for it, for it cost as much per pound as the sugar. Hence the necessity for not serving strangers with sugar by itself, and hence it was that I not unnaturally came to look upon it as a desperate crime for any stranger to attempt to purchase sugar over uncle Bryan's counter without asking at the

same time for a proper quantity of tea or coffee, or some other article upon which there was a profit. My feelings, then, can be imagined when uncle Bryan (being short of sugar, and not having sufficient funds to purchase a bag at the warehouse), bidding me carry a fair-sized market basket, took me with him one dark night—and often afterwards on many other dark nights—to purchase brown sugar, and nothing else, in pounds, half pounds, and quarters. The plan of operation was as follows : uncle Bryan, selecting a likely-looking grocer's shop (an innocent looking fly, he being the spider), would station me at some distance from it, bidding me wait until he returned. Then he would enter the shop boldly, and come out with the air of one who resided in the neighbourhood, holding in his hand a quarter or half pound of feloniously-acquired moist. This he would deposit in the basket (which had a cover to it, to hide our villany), and we would wander to another street, in which he pounced upon another grocer's shop, where the operation

would be repeated. Thus we would wander, often for two or three miles, until the basket was filled with packages of sugar, with which we would return stealthily, like burglars after the successful accomplishment of daring and unlawful deeds. When the basket was too heavy for me to carry, uncle Bryan carried it, and would place me in a convenient spot—always at the corner of two streets, so that in case of pursuit we could make a rapid disappearance—with the basket on the ground. While thus stationed, I have trembled at the very shadow of a policeman, and have often wondered that we were not marched off to prison. Uncle Bryan was not always successful. On occasions he would pause suddenly in the middle of a street, and wheel sharply round. “Can’t go into that shop,” he would say; “was turned out of it the week before last;” or, “They know me there; swore at me when they served me the last time; mustn’t show my face there for another month;” or, with a laugh, “Come away, Chris, quick! That woman wanted to know what I meant

by imposing on a poor widow who was trying to get an honest living." These remarks, of themselves, would have been sufficient to convince me that we were committing an offence against law and morality. At first I was a passive accomplice in these unlawful operations, but in time I became an active agent.

"Chris, my boy," said uncle Bryan to me one night, in an insinuating tone; he was out of spirits, having met with a number of continuous failures; "do you think you could buy a quarter of a pound in that shop?"

"I'll try to, uncle," I said, with a sinking heart, for I had long anticipated the dreaded moment.

"Go into the shop in an off-hand way, as if you were a regular customer. I'll wait at the corner for you."

Go into the shop in an off-hand way! Why, if I had been the greatest criminal in the world, I could not have been more impressed with a sense of guilt. I showed it in my face when I stepped tremblingly to

the counter, and I was instantly detected by the shopkeeper.

“Do you want anything else besides sugar?” he demanded sternly.

“N-no, sir,” I managed to answer.

“Do you know, you young ruffian, that there’s a loss on sugar?” I knew it well enough—too well to convict myself by answering. “What do you say to two ounces of our best mixed at two-and-eight,” he then inquired, with satirical inquisitiveness, “or half a pound of our genuine mocha at one-and-four?”

As I did not know what to say except, “Guilty, if you please, sir!” and as I suspected him of an intention to leap over the counter and seize me by the throat, I fled precipitately, with my heart in my mouth, and the next minute was running away, with uncle Bryan at my heels, as fast as my legs would carry me. When we were well out of danger’s reach, uncle Bryan indulged in the only genuine laugh I had heard from him; but he soon became serious, and we

resumed our unlawful journey. This first attempt was not the last; I tried again and again; but practice, which makes most things perfect, never made me an adept in the art. Dark nights were always chosen for our expeditions, and sometimes so many streets and thoroughfares were closed to uncle Bryan, that he was at his wits' end which way to turn to fill the basket.

Things went on with us in the same way until I was fourteen years of age. Long before this, I had learned all my school-master had to teach me, and I was beginning to be distressed by the thought that I was doing a wrong thing by remaining idle. It was time that I set to work, and tried to help those who had been so good to me. I spoke about it, and uncle Bryan approved in a few curt words.

"I'm afraid he's not strong enough," said my mother.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed uncle Bryan; and I supported him.

"I want to work," I said; "I should like to."

“A good trade would be the best thing,” said my mother.

Weeks passed, and I was still idle. My mother had been busy enough in the meanwhile, but her efforts were unsuccessful. She learnt that a good trade for me meant a good premium from my friends; and that of course was out of the question. It would have been a hard matter to scrape together even so small a sum as five pounds, and the lowest premium asked was far above that amount. I thought it behoved me to look for myself; and I began to stroll about the streets, and search in the shop windows for some such announcement as, “Wanted an apprentice to a good trade: no premium required; liberal wages;” followed by a description which fitted me exactly as the sort of lad which would be preferred. But no such announcement greeted my wistful gaze. I saw bills, “Wanted this,” “Wanted that,” and now and then I mustered sufficient courage to go in and offer myself; but at the end of a month’s experience I could

come to no other conclusion than that I was fit for neither this nor that. My manner was against me ; I was shy and timid, and sometimes could scarcely find words suitable for my application ; but I had that kind of courage which lies in perseverance, and my aspirations were not of an exalted nature ; I was willing to accept anything in the shape of work. I know now that I applied for many situations for which I was totally unfitted, but I was not conscious of it at the time ; and I know also that for a few days I was absurdly and supremely reckless in my estimate of my fitness for the employers who made their wants public. It was during this time that I found myself standing before one of those exceedingly small offices which squeeze themselves by the force of impudence and ingenuity into the very midst of really pretentious buildings, which frown them down, but cannot take the impudence out of them. In the front of this office was a large black board, on which were wafered, in the neatest of round-hand, the most amazing tempta-

tions to persons in search of situations. The first temptation which assailed me was, "Wanted a Gardener for a Gentleman's Family. Must have an Unexceptionable Moral Character. Apply Within." The doubt I had with reference to this announcement was not whether I would do for a gardener (this was during my reckless days, remember), but whether my moral character was unexceptionable. I had never before been called to answer a declaration of this description, and now that it was put to me in bold round-hand, I was stung by the share I took in the lawless sugar expeditions. Not being able to resolve the doubt as to my moral character (although sorely tempted by the exigencies of my position to give myself the benefit of it), I laid aside the gardener for future consideration. The next temptation was, "Wanted a Cook. High Church." I discarded the cook. Reckless as I was, it exceeded the limits of my boldness to declare myself a High-Church Cook. I was

not even aware that I had ever tasted food cooked in that way ; the very flavour was a mystery to me. The next was, "Wanted a Groom, Smart and Active. Seven Stone. Apply within." I debated for some time over seven stone before I decided that it must apply to the weight of the groom. A stone was fourteen pounds. Seven fourteens were ninety-eight. (I did the sum on a dead wall with a bit of brick I picked up in the road.) That I was perfectly ignorant of the duties of a groom did not affect me in the slightest degree ; my only trouble was, did I weigh ninety-eight pounds ? I immediately resolved to ascertain. I strolled into a bye-street, and discovering a mysterious-looking recess wherein were exhibited a small pile of coals and a large pair of scales to weigh them in, I considered it a likely place to solve the problem. I had two half-pennies in my pocket, and I thought I might bargain to be weighed for one of them. So I walked into the recess, and tapping upon the scales with one of the coins,

as a proof that I meant business, waited for the result. The result came in the shape of a waddling woman with a coaly face and an immense bonnet, who said, "Now then?" Timidly I replied, "I want to be weighed, ma'am; I'll give you a half-penny." I was not prepared for the suddenness of what immediately followed. Without the slightest warning the woman lifted me in her arms with great ease, and laid me across the scales (which were shaped like a scuttle), with great difficulty, although I tried honestly to suit myself to the peculiarity of the case. Presently she threw me off as if I were a sack of coals, and tossing the weights aside, one after another, as if they were feathers, said, "There you are!" Her words did not enlighten me. "*Am* I seven stone, ma'am?" I asked, as I handed her the coin. "About," was her reply. I retired, dubious, in a very grimy and gritty condition, and walking to the little office where the black board was, I boldly entered, and asked the young man behind the counter (there was only room

for him and me) if he wanted a groom. *His* reply was, "Half a crown." This was perplexing, and I asked again, and received a similar answer. I soon understood that I should have to pay the sum down before I could be accommodated with particulars, and as a halfpenny was the whole of my wealth, I was compelled to retire, much disheartened.

However, I was successful at length. I obtained a situation as errand-boy, sweeper, and what-not, at a wood-engraver's, the wages being three shillings a week to commence with. How delighted I was when I told my mother, and with what pride I brought home my first week's wages, and placed them in her hand! In the duties of my new position, and in endeavouring, not unsuccessfully, to pick up a knowledge of the business, time passed rapidly. My steady attention to everything that was set me to do gradually attracted the notice of my employer, and he encouraged me in my efforts to raise myself. I was fond of cleanliness

for its own sake, and my mother's chief pleasure was to keep my clothes neat and properly mended. I can see now the value of the difference between my appearance and that of other boys of my own age in the same position of life as myself, and I can more fully appreciate the beauty of a mother's love when it is deep and abiding—as my mother's love was for me.

And here I must say a word, lest I should be misunderstood. Some kindly-hearted readers may suppose that my life and its surrounding circumstances call for pity and commiseration. I declare that they are mistaken, and that I was perfectly happy, contented in the present, hopeful in the future. What more could I desire? Poor as our home was, it was decent and comfortable; the anxieties which invaded it were not, I apprehend, of a more bitter nature than the anxieties which reign in the houses of really well-to-do and wealthy people. Well, I had a home which contented and satisfied me; and dearer, holier, purer than all else, there

was shed upon me a love which brightened my days and sweetened my labour. Life was opening out to me its most delightful pages. Already had I learned to love books for the good that was in them; I was also learning to draw, and every hour's leisure was an hour of profitable enjoyment. I began to see things, not with the eyes of a soured and discontented mind, but with the eyes of a mind which had been, almost unconsciously, trained to learn that sorrow and adversity may bring forth much for which we should be truly and sincerely grateful, and which, but for these trials, might be hidden from us. And all this was due to the influence of Home, and of the love which life's hard trials had strengthened. Sweet indeed are the uses of adversity! But for it, the milk of human kindness would taste like brackish water.

CHAPTER XII.

A SINGULAR EPISODE IN OUR QUIET LIFE.

AT this point I am reminded that I have not described uncle Bryan. A few words will suffice. A tall spare man, strongly built, with no superfluity of flesh about him ; iron-grey hair, thick and abundant ; eyebrows overlapping most conspicuously, guarding his eyes, as it were, which lurked in their caverns, as animals might in their lairs, on the watch. He wore no hair on his face, his cheeks were furrowed, and his features were large and well formed. He possessed the power of keeping himself perfectly under control ; but on rare occasions a nervous twitching of his lips in one corner of his mouth mastered him. This always occurred

when he was in any way stirred to emotion, and I knew perfectly well, although he tried to disguise it from me, that it was one of his greatest annoyances that he could not conquer this physical symptom of mental disturbance. He was not only scrupulously just in his dealings as a tradesman; he exercised this moral sentiment with almost painful preciseness in his intercourse with my mother and me. He had no intimates, and he determinedly rejected all overtures of friendship. His habits were regular, his desires few, his tastes simple. He appeared to be contented with everything, and grateful for nothing. If love resided in his nature, it showed itself in a fondness for flowers: in no other form.

I was nearly eighteen years of age, and the days—garlanded with the sweet pleasures which spring naturally from a mother's love—followed one another calmly and tranquilly. Nothing had occurred to disturb the peaceful current of our lives. Uneventful as the small circumstances of my past life were in the light of surrounding things, each scene in

the simple drama which had thus far progressed was distinctly defined, and seemed to have no connection with what preceded it or followed it. The first, which had occurred in the house where I was born, and which ended with my father's death; the second, in which my mother had taken so mournful a part, and which contained so strange a mingling of joy and sorrow; the third, which was now being played, and which up to this period had been the least eventful of all. A certain routine of duties was got through with unvarying regularity. Uncle Bryan's trade yielded, with careful watching, sufficient profit for our wants; but I, also, was earning money now, and it was with an honest feeling of pride that I paid my mother so many shillings a week—I am almost ashamed to say how few—towards the expenses of my living. And so the days rolled on.

But in the web of our lives a thread was woven of which no sign had yet been seen, and chance or destiny was drawing it to-

wards us with firm hand—a thread which, when it was linked to our hearts, was to throw strong light and colour on the tranquil days.

A very pleasant summer had set in, and uncle Bryan's flowers were at their brightest. It had grown into a custom with my mother to come for me two or three times a week during the fine weather, in the evening, when my day's work was done. She would wait at the corner of the street which led to my place of business, and we generally had a pleasant walk, arriving home at about half-past nine o'clock, in time for supper, a favourite meal with uncle Bryan. Now my mother and I had been for some time casting about for an opportunity to present uncle Bryan with a token of our affection in the shape of a pipe and a tobacco-jar; he was so strange a character that it was absolutely necessary we should have a tangible excuse for the presentation. My mother discovered the opportunity! With great glee she informed me that she had

found out uncle Bryan's birthday, and that the presentation should take the form of a birthday gift. "It will be an unexpected surprise to him, my dear," she said, "and we will say nothing about it beforehand." On a fine morning in August I rose as usual at half-past five, and made my breakfast in the kitchen ; I slept now in the little back-room on a line with the shop and parlour. Eight o'clock was the hour for commencing work, and I generally had a couple of hours' delightful reading in the kitchen before I started. Sometimes, however, when we were busy, I was directed to be at the office an hour or so earlier, and on this morning I was due at seven o'clock. I always wished my mother good-bye before I went to work. Treading very softly, so as not to disturb uncle Bryan, and with my dinner and tea under my arm—invariably prepared the last thing at night, and packed in a handkerchief by my mother's careful hands—I crept up-stairs to her room. She called me in, and I sat by her bedside, chatting for a few

minutes. This was the anniversary of uncle Bryan's birthday, and our purchases were to be made in the evening.

"I must be off, mother," I said, starting up; "I shall have to run for it."

"Good-morning, dear child," she said; "I shall come for you exactly at eight o'clock."

I kissed her, and ran off to work. My mother was punctual in the evening, and we set off at once on a pilgrimage to tobacconists' windows. Any person observing us as we stood at the windows, debating on the shape of this pipe and the pattern of that tobacco-jar, would at once have recognised the importance of our proceedings. At length, after much anxious deliberation, our purchases were made, and we walked home to Paradise Row. My mother had suggested that I should present uncle Bryan with the birthday gifts, and in a vainful moment I had consented, and had mentally rehearsed a fine little speech, which I prided myself was perfect in its way. But, as is usual with the

amateur, and sometimes with the over-confident, on such occasions, my fine little speech flew clean out of my head when the critical moment arrived, and resolved itself into about a dozen stammering and perfectly incomprehensible words. Covered with confusion, I pushed the pipe and tobacco-jar towards uncle Bryan in a most ungraceful manner. My mother saw my difficulty.

“We have brought you a little birthday present, Bryan,” she said, “with our love.”

He made a grimace at the last three words, and I thought at first that he was about to sweep the things from him; but if he had any such intention, he relinquished it.

“How did you know it was my birthday?”

“I found it out.”

“How?”

“Oh,” replied my mother, with a coquettish movement of her head, which delighted me, but did not find favour with uncle Bryan, “little birds come down the chimney to tell me things.”

“Psha!” he muttered impatiently.

“Or perhaps I put this and that together, and found it out that way. You can’t hide anything from a woman, you know.”

Her gay manner met with no sympathetic response from uncle Bryan. On the contrary, he gazed at her for a moment almost suspiciously, but the look softened in the clear light of my mother’s eyes. Then, in a careless, ungracious manner, he thanked us for the present. I was hurt and indignant, and I told my mother a few minutes afterwards, when we were together in the kitchen, that I was sorry we had taken any notice of uncle Bryan’s birthday.

“He would have been much better pleased if we hadn’t mentioned it,” I said.

“No, my dear,” said my mother, “you are not quite right. Your uncle will grow very fond of that pipe by-and-by.”

My mother always won me over to her way of thinking, and I thought the failure might be due to the bungling manner in which I had presented the birthday offerings. I walked about the kitchen, and spoke to

myself the speech I had intended to make, with the most beautiful effect. It was a masterpiece of elegant phrasing, and every sentence was beautifully rounded, and came trippingly off the tongue. Of course I was much annoyed that the opportunity of impressing uncle Bryan with my eloquence was lost. When we re-entered the room, uncle Bryan's head was resting on his hand, and there was an expression of weariness in his face, which had grown pale and sad during our brief absence. My mother's keen eyes instantly detected the change.

"You are not well, Bryan," she said, in a concerned tone, stepping to his side.

"There are two things that disagree with me, Emma," he replied, with a grim and unsuccessful attempt at humour; "my own medicine is one, memory is another. I've been taking a dose of each. There, don't bother me. I have a slight headache, that's all."

But although he tried to turn it off thus lightly, he was certainly far from well; for

he asked my mother to attend to the shop, and leaning back in his chair, threw a handkerchief over his face, and fell asleep. My mother and I talked in whispers, so as not to disturb him. Uncle Bryan was not a supporter of the early-closing movement, for he kept his shop open until eleven o'clock every night. Very dismal it must have looked from the outside in the long winter nights, lighted up by only one tallow candle; but it had always a home appearance for me, from the first day I entered it. The shop-door which led into the street was closed, and so was the door of the parlour in which we were sitting. The upper half of this door was glass, to enable us to see into the shop. My mother's hearing was generally very acute, and the slightest tap on the counter was sufficient to arouse her attention; but the tapping was seldom needed, for the shop-door, having a complaining creak in its hinges, never failed to announce the entrance of a customer. On this night, customers were like angels'

visits, few and far between. It was ten o'clock; uncle Bryan was still sleeping; my mother, whose hands were never idle, was working as usual; I was reading a volume of "Chambers's Tracts for the People," from which many a young mind has received healthy nourishment. I was deep in the touching story of "Picciola, or the Prison Flower," when an amazing incident occurred—heralded by a tap at the parlour-door.

Whoever it was that knocked must not only have opened the street-door, but must have silenced its watch-dog creak (by bribery, perhaps); or else my mother's hearing must have played her very false. Again: it was necessary to lift the ledge of the counter and creep under it, before the parlour-door could be reached.

My mother started to her feet, and opened the door. A young girl, with bonnet and cloak on, stood before us. I thought immediately of the fairy in the cotton-print dress; but no, it was not she who had thus mys-

teriously appeared. The girl looked at us in silence.

"You should have tapped on the counter, my dear," said my mother.

"What for?" was the answer, in the most musical voice I had ever heard. "I don't want to buy anything."

This was a puzzling rejoinder. If she did not want to buy anything, why was she here?

"This is Mr. Carey's?" asked the girl.

"Yes, my dear."

"Who are you?"

Now this was so manifestly a question which should have come from us, and not from her, that I gazed at her in some wonder, and at the same time in admiration, for her manner was very winning. She returned my gaze frankly, and seemed to be pleased with my look of admiration. Certainly a perfectly self-possessed little creature in every respect. Uncle Bryan still slept.

"Who are you?" repeated our visitor, to my mother.

"My name is Carey," said my mother.

“Oh, indeed!” exclaimed the girl. “That is nice. And who is he?” indicating uncle Bryan.

“That is my brother-in-law, Bryan.”

“Mr. Bryan Carey. I’ve come to see him.” And she made a movement towards him. My mother’s hand restrained her.

“Hush, my dear! You must not disturb him.”

“Oh, I am not in a hurry. But I think you ought to help me in with my box.” This to me. “If I was a man, I wouldn’t ask you.”

Her box! Deeper and deeper the mystery grew. When the girl thus directly addressed me, my heart beat with a feeling of intense pleasure. Hitherto I had been mortified that she had evinced no interest in me.

“Come along!” she exclaimed imperiously.

I followed her to the door, like a slave, and there was her box, almost similar in appearance to the box we had brought with us. It was altogether such an astounding experience, and so entirely an innovation

upon the regular routine of our days, that I rubbed my eyes to be sure that I was awake. My mother had closed the door of the room in which uncle Bryan was sleeping, and now stood by my side. I stooped to lift the box, and found it heavy.

“What is in it?” I asked.

“Books and things,” our visitor replied. “I’ll help you. Oh, I’m strong, though I *am* a girl! I wish I was you.”

“Why?”

“Then I should be a boy. There! You see I am almost as strong as you are.”

The box was in the shop by this time. My mother was perfectly bewildered, as I myself was; but mine was a delightful bewilderment. The adventure was so new, so novel, so like an adventure, that I was filled with excitement.

“How did the box come here?” I asked.

“Walked here, of course,” she said somewhat scornfully.

“Nonsense!” I exclaimed; although if she had persisted in her statement, I was quite

ready to believe it, as I would have believed anything from her lips.

“Oh, you don’t believe in things!”

“Yes, I do; but I don’t believe that thing. How *did* it come?”

“A boy carried it. A strong boy—not like you. Isn’t that candied lemon-peel in the glass bottle?”

“Yes.”

“I should like some. I’m very fond of sweet things.”

Quite as though the little girl were mistress of the establishment, my mother went behind the counter, and cut a slice of the lemon-peel.

“What a small piece!” exclaimed the girl, sitting on the box, and biting the candy. “I could put it all in my mouth at once; but I like to linger over nice things.”

And she did linger over it, while we looked on. When she had finished she said,

“I suppose I am to sit here till he wakes.”

“No, my dear,” said my mother, who had been regarding her child-like ways with ten-

derness ; “ you had better come inside. It will be more comfortable. But indeed, indeed, you have bewildered me ! ”

The girl laughed, soft and low, and my mother’s heart went out to her. The next minute we were in the parlour again. My mother motioned that she would have to be very quiet, and pointed to a seat. Before our visitor sat down she took off her bonnet and mantle, and laid them aside. The presence of this slight graceful creature was like a new revelation to me ; the common room became idealised by a subtle charm. But how was the adventure to end ? An hour ago she was not here ; and I wondered how we could have been happy and contented without her. She was exceedingly pretty, and her face was full of expression. That, indeed, was one of her strongest charms. When she spoke, it was not only her tongue that spoke. Her eyes, her hands, the movements of her head, put life and soul into her words, and made them sparkle. Her hair was cut short, and just touched her shoulders ; its colour

was a light auburn. Her hands were small and white; I particularly noticed them as she took from the table the book I had been reading.

"Are you fond of reading?" she asked, in a low tone.

"Yes," I answered. It really seemed to me as if I had known her for years. "Are you?"

"I love it. I like to read in bed. Then I don't care for anything."

Soon she was skimming through "*Picciola*;" but, looking up, she noticed that my mother's eyes were fixed admiringly upon her. She laid the book aside, and approached my mother, so that her words might not be lost.

"It makes it strong to cut it, does it not?" was the first question.

"Makes what strong?" My mother did not know to what it was our visitor referred. I made a shrewd guess, mentally, and discovered that I was right.

"The hair. To cut it when one is young, as mine is cut, makes it strong?"

“Yes, my dear. It will be all the better for being cut.”

“Why do you call me your dear?”

My mother replied gently, with a slight hesitancy: “I won’t if you don’t like me to.”

“Oh, but I like it! And it sounds nice from you. It will be all the better for being cut! That’s what *I* think. It was nearly down to my waist. Do you like it?”

“It is very pretty.”

“And soft, is it not? Feel it. When I was little, it was much lighter—almost like gold. I used to be glad to hear people say, ‘What beautiful hair that child has got!’”

“It will get darker as you grow older.”

“I don’t want it to. I’ll sit in the sun as much as ever I can, so that it shan’t grow darker.”

“Why, my——”

“Dear. Say it, please!”

“My dear, have you been told that that is the way to keep hair light?”

"No, but I think it is. It must be the best way." This with a positive air, as if contradiction were out of the question.

"If you are so fond of your hair, what made you say just now that you wished you were a boy?"

"Because I do wish it. I think it is a shame. Persons ought to have their choice before they're born, whether they would like to be boys or girls."

"My dear!"

"Yes, they ought to have, and you can't help agreeing with me. Then I should have been a boy, and things would have been different. All that I should have wanted would have been to grow tall and strong. Men have no business to be little. But as I am a girl, I must grow as pretty as I can."

And she smoothed her hair from her forehead with her small white hands, and looked at us, and smiled with her eyes and her lips. All this was done with such an utter absence of conscious vanity that it deepened my

admiration, and I was ready to take sides with her against the world in any proposition she might choose to lay down. That she saw this expressed in my face, and that she, in an easy graceful way, received the homage I paid her, as being naturally her due, and did her best—again without conscious artifice—to strengthen it, were as plainly conveyed by her demeanour towards me as though she had expressed it in so many words. It struck me as strange that my mother did not ask her any questions concerning herself, not even her name, nor where she lived, nor what was her errand; and although all of these questions, and especially the first, were on the tip of my tongue a dozen times, I did not have the courage to shape them in words. My mother not saying anything more to her, she turned towards me.

“Are you generally rude to girls—I mean to young ladies?”

“No,” I protested warmly, ransacking my mind for the clue.

“You were to me just now. You said that I spoke nonsense.”

“I am very sorry,” I stammered; “I beg your pardon; but when you said your box walked here——”

“You shouldn’t have asked foolish questions. Never mind; we are friends again.” She gave me her hand, quite as though we had had a serious quarrel, which was now made up. Then she came a little closer to me, and proceeded with “Picciola.”

Nothing further was said until the scene assumed another aspect. I was looking over the pages of the story with her, when, raising my eyes, I saw that uncle Bryan was awake. His eyes were fixed on the girl, with a sort of bewilderment in his face as to whether he was asleep or awake. He looked neither at my mother nor me, but only at the girl. Her head was bent over the book, and he could not see her face. I plucked her dress furtively under the table, and she looked up, and met my uncle’s gaze. Then I noticed his usual sign of agitation, the twitching of his lips.

“What is this, Emma?” he demanded, presently, of my mother.

My mother had been waiting for him to speak. “This young——”

“Lady,” added the girl quickly, as my mother slightly hesitated, and rising with great composure. “Say it. I like to hear it. This young lady——”

Completely dominated by the girl’s gentle imperiousness, my mother said, “This young lady has come to see you.”

He glanced at her uncovered head; then at her bonnet and mantle. A flush came into her cheeks, and she exclaimed,

“Oh, I don’t want to stop, if you’re not agreeable. I only like agreeable people. I was told you would be sure to welcome me in a nice manner. But if you turn me out to-night I don’t exactly know where to go to; and there’s my box——”

“Your box!”

“Yes, with all my things in. It’s in the shop. You can go and see if you don’t believe me. But if you *do* go, I shan’t like

you. You have no right to doubt my word."

Her eyes filled with tears, and these and the words of helplessness she had spoken were sufficient for my mother. She drew the girl to her side with a protecting motion.

"Are you a stranger about here, my dear?"

"I don't know anything of the place," replied the girl, in a more childlike tone than she had yet used. "I have never been in London before, and I have no idea where I am—except that this is Paradise Row. I shouldn't like to wander about the streets at this time of night."

"There is no need, my dear, there is no need. There, there! don't cry."

"But of course," continued the girl, striving to restrain the quivering of her lips, "I would sooner do that than stop where I am not wanted." She would have said more, but I saw that she was fearful of breaking down, and thus showing signs of weakness. I looked somewhat angrily towards uncle Bryan; my mother's arm was still around the girl's waist.

With a quick comprehension he seized all the points of sentiment in the picture.

“Ah,” he growled, “this is more like a leaf out of a story-book than anything else. You”—to the girl—“are injured innocence; you”—to my mother—“are the good genius of the oppressed; and I am the dragon whom St. George here”—meaning me—“would like to spit on his lance.”

“I am sure, Bryan——” commenced my mother, in a tone of mild remonstrance; but uncle Bryan interrupted her.

“Don’t be sure of anything, Emma. Let me understand matters first. How long have I been asleep—days, weeks, or years?”

“Nearly two hours, Bryan.”

“So long! There was a man once who, at the bidding of a magician, but dipped his head into a bucket of water——” he paused moodily.

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed the girl eagerly, advancing a step towards him, with a desire to propitiate him. “Go on. Tell me about him. I’m fond of stories about magicians.”

He stared at her. "Injured innocence," he said, "speak when you're spoken to." She tossed her head, and retreated, and uncle Bryan again questioned my mother. "How long has this little——"

"Young lady," interposed the girl, with a comical assertion of independence.

"This little girl—how long has she been here?"

"About an hour, Bryan."

"Long enough, I see, to make herself quite at home." He seemed to be at a loss for words, and sat drumming his fingers on the table, moving his lips as if he were holding converse with them, and with his eyes turned from us.

In the silence that ensued, the girl stole towards him. My mother's footstool was near his chair, and she sat upon it, and resting her hand timidly on his knee, said, in a sweet pleading voice,

"I wish you would be kind to me."

Her face was upturned to his. He looked down upon it, and placing his hands on

her shoulders, said in a tone which was both low and bitter, which was harsh from passion and tender from a softer emotion which he could not control,

“For God’s sake, child, tell me who you are! What is your name?”

“My name is Jessie Trim.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUDDEN SHOCK.

“EMMA,” said my uncle, “can you find something to do for a few minutes? Chris can shut up the shop.”

We went out of the parlour together, and I put up the shutters, and bolted them. Then my mother and I went down-stairs to the kitchen, and my mother set light to the fire, and warmed up what remained of the day’s dinner. Our usual supper was bread-and-cheese.

“She must be hungry,” said my mother, “and I think it will please your uncle.”

“I am glad she is going to stay, mother. Do you think she will stop altogether with us?”

"I have no idea, child."

"Jessie Trim! It's a pretty name, isn't it? Jessie, Jessie! Mother, why didn't you ask her her name when she came in?"

"She came to see your uncle, Chris. We must never forget one thing, my dear. This is his house, and he has been very kind to us."

"He would be angry if he heard you say so."

"That is his nature, and I should not say it to him. The least we can do in return for all his goodness is to study him in every possible way in our power. To have asked her all about herself might have been like stealing into his confidence. He may have secrets which he would not wish us to know."

"Secrets! Do you think *she* is one of them?"

"My dear, I know nothing. But let you and me make up our minds,—I made up my mind a long time ago, Chris—not to be too curious concerning anything your uncle

does. If he wished us to know anything, he would tell us of his own free will."

"I don't suppose he has anything to tell," I said, with not the slightest belief in my own words.

"Perhaps not. Anyhow, we'll not say anything—eh, Chris?"

"Very well, mother. She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Very, very pretty."

"Such beautiful hair—and such white hands!"

I was proceeding with my raptures, when my mother tapped my cheek merrily, which brought the blood into my face, strangely enough.

"At all events," I said, "I hope she will stay with us always."

"You stupid Chris! What has got into your head? I really don't suppose she will stay very long."

"But she has brought her box—and—and——"

My mother suddenly assumed a look of

perplexity. "Really, really now," she said, sitting down, and holding me in front of her, "I know every mark upon you. You have a brown mole on your left side, and a little red spot like a currant on the back of your neck, and another one just here——" and then she paused.

"Well, mother?"

"Well, Chris, I really *cannot* remember that I have ever seen a note of interrogation anywhere about you. Have you got one, my dear? And where is it?"

"But, mother," I said, laughing and kissing her, "I must be inquisitive, and I must ask questions."

"Only of me, dear child."

"Well, then, only of you. Now wouldn't you grow quite fond of her?"

"I am sure I should, dear."

"Well, wouldn't it be too bad, directly you got fond of her, for her to go away? Now wouldn't it?"

"But life is full of changes, my dear!"

"That's not an answer, mother. You're

fond of me ;”—an endearing caress answered me—“very, very fond, I know, and I am of you. Now, supposing *I* was to go away !”

“Child, child !” cried my mother, kneeling suddenly before me and clasping me in her arms. “If I were to lose you, my heart would break !”

I was frightened at the vehement passion of her words, and at the white face upon which my eyes rested ; but she grew more composed presently. Then the voice of uncle Bryan was heard at the top of the stairs, calling to us to come up.

“What can we do with our visitor to-night, Emma ?” he said, thus indicating that matters had been arranged during our absence.

“She can sleep with me. You won’t mind, my dear ?”

“I shall like to,” replied Jessie. “He’s ever so much nicer than he was, although I can’t say that he’s at all polite.” This referred to uncle Bryan, who made a grimace. “I couldn’t help coming.”

"The least said," observed uncle Bryan, with all his usual manner upon him, "the soonest mended, young lady."

She pursed up her lips: "Young lady! That was all very well when we were distant. You may call me something else now, if you like."

"Indeed! Well, then, Miss Trim."

She laughed saucily. "How funny it sounds as you say it! Miss Trim! I think we are quite intimate enough for you to call me Jessie."

"You think!" retorted uncle Bryan, with some sense of enjoyment. "You are given to thinking, I have no doubt."

"Oh, yes; I think a good deal."

"Upon my word! What about?"

"All sorts of things that wouldn't interest you."

"I quite believe you, young lady."

"Oh, if you like to call me that," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, "you can. But I think it's a pity when people

try to make themselves more disagreeable than they naturally are."

For the life of him, uncle Bryan could not help laughing. This little play of words was to him what the world is always looking out for now-a-days—a new sensation.

"Then I am naturally disagreeable, you think?"

She did not reply.

"What else do you think about me?"

"I think it must be uncomfortable for the others for you to go to sleep every night, with a handkerchief over your face."

"If I had known you were coming——" he said, with mock politeness; but she interrupted him with wonderful quickness.

"Don't say unkind things. I feel when they are coming; my flesh begins to creep."

"Do you think anything else about me?"

"Yes; I think you might give me some supper. You can't know how hungry I am; and I have always a good appetite."

My mother was so intent upon this un-

usual dialogue, and was probably so lost in wonder (as I myself was) at the appearance of uncle Bryan in a new character, that she had entirely forgotten the supper; but at Jessie Trim's mention of it she ran downstairs, and it was soon on the table.

"Ah," exclaimed Jessie, with approving nods; "that smells nice."

Uncle Bryan stared at the unexpected fare.

"You see what it is to be a young lady," he said; "hitherto we have always been contented with bread-and-cheese."

"This is much nicer," said Jessie, beginning to eat; "are you not going to have some?"

"No. Give me some bread-and-cheese, Emma."

The girl was too much occupied with her supper to bandy words with him; she ate heartily, and when she had finished, asked uncle Bryan if he did not feel in a better humour.

"I always do," she remarked, "after meals.

There is only one thing I want now to make me feel quite amiable."

"Then," said uncle Bryan sententiously, "all the trouble in the world would come to an end."

She nodded acquiescently.

"And that one thing is——" he questioned.

"Something I shan't get. I see it in your face; it is really too much to ask for."

"To put an end to all the trouble in the world, I would make a sacrifice."

"No," she said, shaking her head, "I really haven't courage to ask."

"What is it?" demanded uncle Bryan impatiently.

Then ensued a perfect piece of comedy-acting on the part of Jessie Trim; who, when she had worked uncle Bryan almost into a passion, made the prettiest of curtseys, and said that the only thing she wanted to make her feel quite amiable was a piece of candied lemon-peel.

"I always," she added, with the oddest

little twinkle in her eyes, "like something sweet to finish my meals with."

The expression on uncle Bryan's face was so singular that I did not know if he was going to laugh or storm. But Jessie got her piece of candied lemon-peel, and chewed it with great contentment, and with many sly looks at uncle Bryan.

"Now, then," he cried, "it is time to go to bed."

"It isn't healthy," observed Jessie, who seemed determined to upset all the rules of the house, "to go to bed the moment after one has eaten a heavy supper." She spoke with perfect gravity, and with the serious authority of a grown-up woman.

"Then we are to sit up after our time because you have over-eaten yourself."

"I have not over-eaten myself. I have had just enough. I wish you wouldn't say disagreeable things; you would find it much nicer not to. If you think I am not right in what I say about going to bed immediately after supper, of course I will go.

You are much older than I, and ought to be much wiser."

"But I think you *are* right," he growled.

"Why do you make yourself disagreeable then?" she asked, sitting down on the stool at his feet.

Not a word was spoken for half an hour; at the end of which time our visitor rose, just as if she were the mistress of the house, and remarked that now she *did* think it time we were all in bed.

"Good-night," she said, giving him her hand; "I hope I haven't vexed you." She held up her face to him to be kissed, but he did not avail himself of the invitation, and retired to his room.

"He is a very strange man," she said to us, "and I don't quite know whether I like him or whether I don't. Good-night, Chris."

"Good-night, Jessie."

My mind was full of her and her quaint ways as I undressed myself, and I found myself unconsciously repeating, "Good-night,

Jessie! Jessie! Jessie!" Her name was to me the sweetest of morsels. "I am glad she has come," I thought; "I hope she will stop." I had not been in my room two minutes before I heard her knocking at the door of the room in which uncle Bryan slept. I crept to the wall to listen.

"Do you hear me?" she said. "You can't be asleep already."

But no response came from uncle Bryan.

"Do answer me!" she continued. "If you think I have been rude to you, I am very sorry. I shall catch my death of cold if I stand here long. Say, good-night, Jessie!"

"Good-night."

"Jessie!" she called out archly.

"Good-night, Jessie. Now go to bed, like a good—little girl."

And then the house was quiet, and I fell asleep, and dreamt the strangest and sweetest dreams about our new friend.

The following morning when I rose I moved about very quietly, and I debated with myself whether I ought to bid my

mother good-morning as usual. I stole softly upstairs, and put my ear to the door.

“Good-morning, mother.”

I almost whispered the words, but the reply came instantly, in clear sweet tones,

“Good-morning, dear child.”

She must have been listening for my step.

“Is that you, Chris?” inquired a voice which, if I had not known the speaker, I should have imagined had proceeded from a little child.

“Yes, Jessie,” I answered, with a thrill of delight.

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to work.”

“Good-morning.”

“Good-morning.”

I had never been so happy in my work as I was during this day, and yet I wanted the hours to fly so that I might be home again. When eight o'clock struck, I whipped off my apron eagerly, and ran out of the office. My mother was at the gate.

“I didn't expect you, mother.”

"No, dear child. I wished to leave your uncle and Jessie together for a little while. She wanted to come with me, but I thought it best to leave her at home. Shall we take a walk, my dear?"

"Yes, but not a long one. Mother, who is she?"

"I do not know, my dear; and your uncle hasn't said a word—neither has she."

"Not a word! Why, mother, she couldn't keep quiet!"

"I don't think she could, dear," said my mother, with a smile. "I mean not a word as to who she is. I think she gave your uncle a letter, for he has been writing to-day with one before him; but I am not sure."

"I have been thinking about her all day, and I can't make her out. Anyhow, I hope she will stop with us. The house is quite different with her in it. Don't you think so? She is as light-hearted and as sparkling as a—a sunbeam." I thought it a very happy simile. "She couldn't be anything else."

“My dear,” said my mother gravely, “she was sobbing in her sleep last night as if her heart would break.” I looked so grieved at this that my mother quickly added, “But she has been talking to your uncle to-day just as she did last night. She is like an April day; but then she is quite a child.”

“A child! Why, mother, she must be—how old should *you* think?”

“About fifteen, I should say, Chris.”

“So how can she be quite a child? And she doesn’t talk like a child.”

“She does and she doesn’t, my dear. I shouldn’t wonder,” she said, with her sweet laugh, “that because you are nearly eighteen, you think yourself quite a man.”

“I *am* growing, mother, am I not?” And I straightened myself stiffly up. “Why, I am taller than you!”

“You will be as tall as your father was, my dear.”

“I am glad of that. She said men had no business to be little.”

"*She* said!" repeated my mother, laughing; and she tapped my cheek merrily, as she had done on the previous night, and again I blushed. Jessie ran into the shop to welcome us when we arrived home.

The evening passed very happily with me, Jessie entertaining us with her light talk. Her marvellous ingenuity, in twisting a few simple words so as to make them bear sparkling meanings, afforded me endless enjoyment. Uncle Bryan said very little, and, notwithstanding the many challenges she slyly threw out to him, declined to be drawn into battle; but now and then she provoked him to answer her. He needed all his skill to hold his own against her, and he spoke rather roughly to her once or twice. On these occasions she became grave, and edged closer to my mother, having already learned that nothing but what was gentle could emanate from her tender nature. When Jessie went to bed with my mother, she did not hold up her face to be kissed, as she had done on the previous night. I do not think

she debated the point with herself, whether she should do so; she gave him a rapid look when she wished him good-night, and decided on the instant—as she would have decided the other way had she seen anything in his face to encourage her. A week passed, and no word of explanation fell from uncle Bryan's lips as to the connection that existed between these two opposite beings; but I could not help observing that he grew more and more reserved, more and more thoughtful. In after days I recognised how strange a household ours really was during this period, but it did not strike me at the time, so entirely was I wrapped up in the new sense of happiness which Jessie Trim had brought into my life. Of the four persons who composed the household only Jessie and I were really happy. My mother was distressed because of uncle Bryan's growing moroseness; with unobtrusive gentleness she strove, in a hundred little ways, to break through the wall of silence and reserve which he built around himself, as it were,

but she could scarcely win a word from his lips. It did not trouble me ; my mind was occupied only with Jessie. What Jessie did, what Jessie said, how Jessie looked and felt and thought—that was the world in which I moved now. A second week passed, and there was still no change. One night my mother said that she would come for me on the following evening.

“And bring Jessie,” I suggested, taking advantage of the opportunity which I had been waiting for all the week ; “a walk will do her good.”

Jessie’s eyes sparkled at the suggestion.

“I should like to come,” she said, with a grateful look ; “I haven’t had a walk since I came here. What are you thinking about?” to my mother.

“I am thinking,” replied my mother, “whether there will be any objection to it?”

“On whose part?” I asked. “Uncle Bryan’s ? Why, what objection can he have ?”

“I am sure,” said Jessie, “he won’t care, one way or another; he doesn’t care about anything, and especially about me. Why, how many words do you think he has spoken to me all this day, Chris?”

“I can’t guess, Jessie.”

She counted on her fingers. “One, two, three — sixteen. ‘I don’t know anything about it! Be quiet! You’re a magpie—nothing but chatter, chatter, chatter!’ and he didn’t speak them—he growled them. So he can’t care. I shall come, Chris,” —pressing close to my mother coaxingly— “and we’ll take a nice long walk.”

“Very well, my dear,” said my mother, with a smile; “but I *must* ask your uncle, Chris.”

I mapped out in my mind the pleasantest walk I knew, and on the following night, when work was over, I hastened into the street; but neither my mother nor Jessie was there. I looked about for them, and waited for a quarter of an hour, and then raced home. Only my mother was in the house.

“Why didn’t you come, mother?” I asked.
“I’ve been waiting ever so long. And where’s Jessie?”

“My dear,” replied my mother, with her arm around my waist, “Jessie has gone.”

“Gone! Oh, for a walk with uncle Bryan, I suppose?”

“No, my dear; she has gone away altogether.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WORLD BECOMES BRIGHT AGAIN.

“GONE away altogether !”

I echoed the words, but the news was so sudden and unexpected that for a few moments I did not quite understand their meaning. I had never, until the last fortnight, had a friend so nearly of my own age as Jessie ; and the companionship had been to me so sweet and delightful, and so altogether new, that to lose it now seemed like losing the best part of my life. I released myself from my mother's embrace, and ran up-stairs to her bed-room, to look for Jessie's box. It was gone, and the room was in all respects the same as it had been before Jessie's arrival. Until that time it had

always worn a cheerful aspect in my eyes, but now it looked cold and desolate; the happy experiences of the last two weeks seemed to me like a dream—but a dream which, now that it had passed away, filled my heart with pain.

“Her box is gone,” I said, with quivering lips, when I rejoined my mother.

“It was taken away this morning, my dear.”

“That shows that she is not coming back; and I shall never, never see her again!”

My mother did not reply. The feeling that now stole upon me was one of resentment towards uncle Bryan. Who was to blame but he? From the first he had behaved harshly towards her. He saw that we were fond of her, and he was jealous of her. He was always cold and unsympathetic and unkind. Every unreasonable suggestion that presented itself to me with reference to him I welcomed and accepted as an argument against him; and to this effect I spoke hotly and intemperately.

"Chris, Chris, my dear," remonstrated my mother, "you should not have hard thoughts towards your uncle."

"I can't help it; he almost asks for them. He won't let us like him—he won't! I don't care if he hears me say so."

"He can't hear you, my dear; he went away with Jessie this morning."

"Where to?"

"I have no idea, Chris; he did not tell me."

"And wouldn't, if you had asked," I said bitterly.

My mother sighed, but said, with gentle firmness, "I had no right to ask, my dear."

"Then we are alone in the house," I said bitterly.

"Yes, my dear, for a little while. Sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

I sat down, and my mother sat beside me, and took my hand in hers.

"It came upon me as suddenly as it has come upon you, my dear, and I am almost as sorry as you are. But life is full of such changes, my dear child."

“Go on, mother.” In my rebellious mood her gentle words brought no comfort to me.

“When I said last night that I would come for you this evening, I had no idea that anything would have prevented me. I intended to bring Jessie, and I looked forward with pleasure to the walk we intended to take. I did not tell your uncle that Jessie would come with me; I thought I would wait till tea-time. Lately I have considered it more than ever my duty to study him, because of the change that has taken place in him—you must have noticed it yourself—since Jessie came so strangely among us. For it was strange, was it not, my dear ?—almost as strange as her going away so suddenly, and as unexpected too; for I am certain your uncle did not expect her, and that he was as much surprised as we were. He is not to blame, therefore, for what has occurred now. It is not for us, dear child, to find fault with him because he is silent and reserved with us; the only feeling we ought to have towards him is one

of deep gratitude for his great kindness to us. You don't forget our sad condition, my darling, on the morning we received your uncle's letter."

"No, mother, I don't forget," I said, somewhat softened towards uncle Bryan.

"He did not deceive us; he spoke plainly and honestly, and the brightest expectations we could have entertained from his offer, and the manner in which it was made, have been more than realised. Is it not so, dear child?"

In common honesty I was compelled to admit that it was so.

"I shudder when I think what might have become of my dear boy if it had not been for this one friend—this one only friend, my darling, in all the wide, wide world!—who stepped forward so unselfishly to save us. And we have been so happy here, my darling, so very, very happy, all these years! If a cloud has come, have we not still a little sunshine left? There, there, my dear!" returning my kisses, and wiping

her eyes; “as I was saying”—(although she had said nothing of the kind; but she was flurried and nervous)—“and as I told you once before, I think Jessie gave your uncle a letter, and that I saw him, the day after she came, writing, with this letter before him. Every morning since then I have observed him watch for the arrival of the postman in the neighbourhood, and every time the postman passed without giving him the letter which I saw he expected, he grew more anxious. This morning he reminded me that I had some errands to make; I was away for nearly two hours, and when I came home he and Jessie were in the shop, dressed for walking. What passed after that was so quick and rapid that I was quite bewildered. Your uncle, beckoning me into the parlour, said that he and Jessie were going away, and that I was to take care of the shop while he was absent. ‘I want you not to ask any questions,’ he said, seeing, I suppose, that I was about to ask some. ‘I shall be away

for two or three days, perhaps longer. Do the best you can. You had better wish Jessie good-bye now.' I could not help asking, 'Is she coming back with you?' And he said, 'No.' I was so grieved, Chris, that when I went into the shop, where Jessie was waiting, I was crying. 'You are sorry I am going, then,' she said. 'Indeed, indeed, I am, my dear,' I replied, as I kissed her. She kissed me quite affectionately, and said she was glad I was sorry, and that I was to give her love to you——"

"Did she say that, mother? Did she?"

"Yes, my dear. 'Give my love to Chris,' she said, 'and say how sorry I am to go away without seeing him.' And the next minute she was gone. I thought of her box then, and I ran upstairs, as you did just now, and found that it had been taken away while I was out. And that is all I know, my dear."

"It is very strange," I said, after a long pause. "Mother, what do you think of it?"

“My dear, I don’t know what to think. The more I think, the more I am confused. And now, dear child——”

“Yes, mother.”

“We must make ourselves happy in our old way, and we must attend to the business properly until your uncle returns.”

Make ourselves happy in our old way! How was that possible? The light had gone out of the house. The very room in which we three—uncle Bryan, my mother, and I—had spent so many pleasant days before Jessie came, looked cold and comfortless now. Even the figure of my dear mother, bustling cheerfully about, and the sweet considerate manner in which she strove, in many tender ways, to soften my sorrow, were not a recompense for the loss of Jessie. I opened my book and pretended to be occupied with it, and my mother, with that rare wisdom which springs from perfect unselfish love, did not disturb my musings. The evening passed very quietly, and directly the shop was shut, I went to bed.

I was in a very unhappy mood, and it was past midnight before I fell asleep. I did not think of my mother, or of the pain she was suffering through me. My grief was intensely selfish; I had not the strength which often comes from suffering, nor was I blessed with such a nature as my mother's—a nature which does not colour surrounding circumstances with the melancholy hue of its own sorrows. Unhappily, it falls to the lot of few to be brought within the sweet influence of one whose mission on earth seems to be to shed the light of peace and love upon those among whom her lot is cast, and to whom, unless we are ungratefully forgetful, as I was on this night, we look instinctively for comfort and consolation when trouble comes to us. In the middle of the night, I awoke suddenly, and found my mother sitting by my bed; she was in her night-dress, and there was a light in the room.

“Why, mother!” I exclaimed, confused for a moment.

"Don't be alarmed, dear child," she said; "there's nothing the matter; but I could not sleep, knowing that you were unhappy. You, too, my dear, were a long time before you went to sleep."

Then I knew that she must have watched and waited at my bed-room door until I had blown out my candle.

"What time is it, mother?"

"It must be three o'clock, my dear."

"Oh, mother! And you awake at this time of the night for me!"

She smiled softly. Something of worship for that pure nature stole into my heart as I looked into her dear eyes. But there was grief in them, too, and I asked her the reason.

"Do you know, my darling," she said, with a wistful yearning look, and with a sigh which she vainly strove to check, "that you went to bed to-night without kissing me? For the first time in your life, dear child; for the first time in your life!"

In a passion of remorse I threw my arms

around her neck, and kissed her again and again, and asked her forgiveness, and said, "How could I—how could I be so unloving and unkind?" But she stopped my self-reproaches with her lips on my lips, and with broken words of joy and thankfulness. She folded me in her arms, and there was silence between us for many minutes—silence made sacred by love as pure and faithful as ever dwelt in woman's breast. Then I drew the clothes around her, and she lay by my side, saying that she would wait until I was asleep.

"This is like the old time, mother," I whispered, "when there was no one else but you and me. But I love you more than I did then, mother."

"My darling child!" she whispered, in return; "how you comfort me! But I won't have my dear boy speak another word, except good-night."

We looked out on the following day for a letter from uncle Bryan, but none came, nor any news of him. It was the same on

the second day, and the third. My mother began to grow uneasy.

“If he had only left word where he was going to!” she said. “I am afraid he must be ill.”

The business went on very well without him, thanks to my mother’s care and attention, except that on Saturday night the supply of “uncle Bryan’s pills,” as they had got to be called in the neighbourhood, ran short, which occasioned my mother much concern. Sunday and Monday passed, and still no tidings of him. On the Tuesday—I remember the day well; we were very busy where I was employed, and I did not come home until past ten o’clock—the shop was shut—a most unusual thing. I knocked at the door hurriedly, and my mother, with happiness in her face, opened it for me.

“Uncle Bryan has come home!” I cried, in a hearty tone.

She nodded gladly, and I ran in, and threw my arms about him. I think he was pleased with this spontaneous mark of affection; but

he looked at me curiously too, I thought. We sat down—the three of us—and a dead silence ensued. We all looked at each other, and spoke not a word.

“What’s the matter, mother?” I asked, for certainly so strange a silence needed explanation.

A sweet laugh answered me, and my heart almost leaped into my throat. I darted behind the door, and there stood Jessie Trim, bending forward, with eager face, and sparkling eyes, and hand uplifted to her ear. But when she saw that she was discovered, her manner changed instantly. She came forward, quite demurely.

“Are you glad?” she asked gravely, with her hand in mine.

My looks were a sufficient answer.

“And now,” she said, sitting down on the stool, and resting her hands on her lap, “we are going to live happily together for ever afterwards.”

CHAPTER XV.

JESSIE'S ROSE-WATER PHILOSOPHY.

HER voice was like music to my heart. With Jessie on one side of me, and my mother on the other, there was not a cloud on my life, nor room for one. I sat between them, now patting my mother's hand, now turning restlessly to Jessie, and looking at her in delight. But the change in the aspect of things was so sudden and unexpected, that it would not have much amazed me to see Jessie melt into thin air. This must have been expressed in my face, for Jessie, who was a skilful interpreter of expression, whispered,

“It is true; I have really come back.”

“I was doubting,” I said, in a similar low tone, “whether I was asleep or awake.”

“Don’t speak loud,” she said mockingly, “don’t look at me too hard, and don’t blow on me, or you will find that you are only dreaming. Shall I pinch you?”

“No; I am awake, I know. This is the most famous thing that ever happened.”

“You were sorry when I went away, then?”

“I can’t tell you how sorry; but you are not going away again?”

“I suppose not; I have no place to go to.”

There was a change in her manner; she was more thoughtful and sedate than usual, and her face was pale; but I noted these signs only in a casual way. To be certain that everything was right, I went out of the room to see if her box had been brought back. It was in its old place in my mother’s bed-room. My mother had followed me.

“So you are happy again, my dear,” she said, as we stood, like lovers, with our arms around each other’s waist.

“I *am* glad, mother,” I replied, pressing

her fondly 'to me; "and so are you too, I know. But tell me how it all happened."

"There is very little to tell, dear child. I was as surprised as you were. I was having tea when your uncle and Jessie came in suddenly; it gave me quite a turn, for Jessie, as you see, is in mourning." (I had not noticed it, and I wondered at my blindness.) "Your uncle looked worn and anxious, and they were both very tired, as if they had come a long distance. 'I have not quite deserted you, you see,' your uncle said. I told him how glad I was he had returned, and how anxious we had been about him. 'And Jessie, too,' I said. 'I was afraid I was not to see her again.'" 'You will see a great deal of her for the future,' said your uncle; 'she will live with us now. She must sleep with you, as there is no other room in the house for her.' And that is positively all I have to tell, Chris, except that Jessie has been very quiet all the evening, and only showed her old spirits when your knock was heard at the street-door."

“And Jessie has told you nothing, mother?”

“Nothing, dear child; and I have not asked.”

“You don’t even know whom she is in mourning for?”

“No, my dear.”

Jessie was displaying more of her old spirits when my mother and I went downstairs; as we entered the room she was saying to uncle Bryan,

“I wish you would tell me what I *am* to call you. I can’t call you Bryan, and I don’t like Mr. Carey. I could invent a name certainly, if I wanted to be spiteful.”

“What name?” he asked, in his rough manner.

“Never mind. You’d like to know, so that you could bark and fight. What *shall* I call you?”

“Call me what you please,” he answered.

“Well, then, I shall call you uncle Bryan, as Chris does; I daresay I shall get used to it in time.”

Soon after this point was settled I found an opportunity to touch Jessie's black dress, and to press her hand sympathisingly. She understood the meaning of the action, and her lips quivered; she did not speak another word until she went to bed. The events of the evening had for a time driven from my head news which I had to tell, and which I knew would be received with pleasure. My errand-running days were over. My employer, whose name was Eden, satisfied with the manner in which I had performed my duties, had placed me on the footing of a regular apprentice, and I was to learn the art of wood-engraving in all its branches. A fair career was therefore open to me. It is needless for me to say how these good tidings rejoiced my dear mother.

"Mr. Eden," I said, "has often asked to see my little sketches, and has been pleased with them, I think. He told me that he commenced in the same way himself, and he has given me every encouragement. He says that in three years I shall be able to earn

good wages. Who knows? I may have a business of my own one day."

"And you have only yourself to thank for it, my dear child," said my mother, casting looks of pride around.

"No, mother; you are wrong. I have kept the best bit to the last. Mr. Eden has spoken of you a good many times—he has often seen you, you know, when you came for me of an evening—and I have told him all about you. When he called me into his office this afternoon, he said that I had you to thank for this promotion, and that I was to tell you so, with his compliments."

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed my mother; "Mr. Eden has never spoken one word to me."

"But he has seen you," interrupted uncle Bryan, the tone and meaning of his words being strangely at variance, "and that is enough. Mr. Eden is right, Chris. Whatever good fortune comes to you in life, you have only one person in the world to thank for it."

“I think so too, uncle.” His words softened me towards him, and I went to his side, and said gratefully, “You have been very good to me, sir, also.”

“Psha !” he said, with an impatient movement of his head. “Emma, if you will fill my pipe for me, I will smoke it.”

The pipe we had presented to him on his birthday had not yet been used, and my mother took it from the mantelshelf, filled it, and handed it to him. He received it with a kind of growl, implying that he had been conquered unawares; but he smoked it with much inward contentment nevertheless.

I was so excitedly happy when I went to bed, that I was as long getting to sleep as I was on the night of Jessie’s sudden disappearance. Here and there life is dotted with sunny spots, the light of which is but rarely entirely darkened, and had Jessie never returned, she might have dwelt in my mind as one of these; or—so surrounded with romance was her appearance

and disappearance—I might have grown to wonder whether she was a creation of my fancy, or had really belonged to my life. But now that she was among us again, and was going to live with us, I felt as if a bright clear stream were flowing within me, invigorating and gladdening my pulses—a sweet refreshing stream within the range of which sadness or melancholy could find no place. Reason became the slave of creative thought, and within my heart flowers were blooming, the beautiful forms and colours of which could never wither and fade. Jessie had struck the key-note of my certain belief when she said, “And now we are going to live happily together for ever afterwards.”

Curious as I was to know why she had returned to us in mourning, I held my tongue, out of respect for my mother’s wish that we should ask no questions. Jessie’s quieter mood soon wore away ; little by little she introduced colour into her dress, and in three months she was out of mourning. I fancied now and then, as these alterations in her dress

were made, that her manner towards uncle Bryan indicated an expectation that he would speak to her on the subject. But he made no remark, and noticed her the least when most she invited notice.

She changed the entire aspect of our house. It belonged to her to brighten, apparently without conscious effort, everything which came in contact with her. The contrast between her and my mother was very great. My mother's tastes, like her nature, were quiet and unassuming. Her hair was always plainly done, and, within my experience, she had never worn cap or flower; her dress was always of one sober tint; and her pale face and almost noiseless step were in keeping with these. If she had had the slightest reason to suppose that by placing a flower in her hair, or by wearing a bit of bright ribbon, or by any other innocently-attractive device, she could have given me or uncle Bryan pleasure, she would have done so instantly; but, out of her entire disregard of self, no such thought ever entered her

mind. Now Jessie was fond of flowers and ribbons, and was gifted with the rare faculty of knowing where a bit of colour, and what colour, would prove most attractive. From the most simple means she produced the most exquisite results. Her box was a perfect Pandora's box in its inexhaustible supply of adornments, and she was continually surprising us with something new, or something which she made to look like new. And she was by no means disposed to hide her light under a bushel. Everything she did must be admired, and if admiration did not come spontaneously, she was very prompt in asking or even begging for it. It was amusing to watch the tricky efforts by which she strove to attract attention to anything she was wearing for the first time, however trifling it might be, or to the slightest change in the arrangement of her dress. Then, when her object was attained, she would ask, "And do you really like it? Are you sure now?" or "Would it look better so?" or "What do you think of its being this way—or that?"

I was the person whom she consulted most frequently ; but I could see nothing to find fault with, and could never suggest any improvement ; whereas uncle Bryan would shrug his shoulders, and mutter disparaging remarks, which never failed to provoke warm replies from Jessie. Then he would smile caustically, and hit her hard with words still more spiteful, or retire into his shell, according to his humour.

“ We will have a world made especially for you, young lady,” he said—whenever he was disposed to be bitter, he called her “ young lady ”—“ a world full of ribbons and flounces and flowers and silk dresses and satin shoes, and everything else you crave for.”

“ That would be nice,” she observed complacently.

“ And you shall live in it all alone, so that your title to these nice things shall not be disputed.”

“ That wouldn’t do,” she answered promptly ; “ what is the use of having nice things unless you get people to admire them ? ”

“We will have people made to order for you, then; people who shall be always admiring you and praising you and flattering you.” He rung changes on this theme for five minutes or so, and when he paused, she made a grimace, as if she had been compelled to swallow a dose of medicine. But this kind of warfare did not alter her nature. She coaxed my mother to buy a pair of pretty ornaments for the mantelshelf; she coaxed uncle Bryan—how she managed it, heaven only knows! but she was cunning, and she must have entrapped him in an unguarded moment—to allow her to buy a piece of oil-cloth for the table, and she herself chose the pattern; and in many other ways she made it apparent that a new spirit was at work in our household. She made the bedroom in which she and my mother slept the prettiest room in the house; pictures were hung or pasted on the wall; her own especial looking-glass was set in a framework of white muslin, daintily edged with blue ribbon. “Blue is my favourite

colour," she said, as she stood, the fairest object there, pointing out to me some trifling improvement; "it suits my complexion." It is not difficult to understand how popular she soon became in the neighbourhood; admiring eyes followed her whenever she appeared in the narrow streets round about, and I would not have changed places with an emperor when I walked out with her by my side. If any one quality in her could have made her more precious to me, it was her feeling towards my mother.

"No one can help loving her," said Jessie to me, in one of our confidential conversations. "Is she ever angry with any one?"

"I think not," I replied. "Where another person would be angry, she is sorry. There isn't another mother in the world like mine."

"Would you like me to be like her? Would it be better for me, do you think?"

"I like you as you are, Jessie; I shouldn't like you to alter. There are different kinds of good people, you know."

"I am not good."

"Nonsense! you not good!"

"Your mother is, Chris; she never goes to bed without kneeling down and saying her prayers."

"I know it, Jessie. And you?"

"Oh, I often forget—always when I go to bed before her. When we go together, I kneel down, and shut my eyes; but I don't say anything. I see things."

On one occasion Jessie met me at the street-door when I came home from work, and led me with an air of importance into the sitting room, where my mother sat in a new dress and a cap with ribbons in it. My mother blushed as I looked at her.

"She *would* make me do it, Chris," she said apologetically.

"Now doesn't she look prettier so?" asked Jessie.

There was no denying it; I had never seen my mother look so attractive, and I kissed her and told her so.

"That makes it all right," cried Jessie,

clapping her hands. "All the time I was persuading her, she said, 'What will Chris say?' and, 'Will not Chris think it strange?'"

And Jessie pretended that something was wrong with the cap, and spread out a ribbon here and a ribbon there, and fluttered about my mother in the prettiest way, and then fell back to admire her handiwork.

"I want a new nightcap," growled uncle Bryan, adding, with a sarcastic laugh, "but the ribbons in it must suit my complexion."

The next night Jessie gravely presented him with a nightcap gaily decorated with ribbons. "It will become you beautifully," she said, with a demure look. When he crossed lances with her, he was generally vanquished.

Jessie explained to me the philosophy of all this.

"I like everything about me to look nice," she said; "what else are things for? Everybody ought to be nice to everybody. What are people sent into the world for, I should like to know—to make each other comfortable or miserable?"

I subscribed most heartily to this rose-water philosophy. Certainly, if Jessie had had her way, there would have been no heartaches in the world, no poverty, no sickness, no rags, no rainy days. The sun would have been eternally shining where she moved, and everything around her would have been eternally bright. The world would have been a garden, and she the prettiest flower in it.

In the meantime I was making rapid progress in my business. My great ambition was to become a good draughtsman; and I had learnt all that could be learnt in the school of art, which I had attended regularly for some time.

“Now sketch from nature,” the master said; “I can do nothing more for you. You have a talent for caricature, but before that can be properly developed, you must learn figure drawing from the life.”

These words fired me, and I commenced my studies in this direction with my mother, who was always ready to stand in any uncomfortable position for any length of time,

while I laboured to reproduce her. Perhaps I would come suddenly into the room while she was stooping over the fire, or standing on tip-toe to reach something from the top shelf of the cupboard. "Stand still, mother," I would cry; "don't move!" And the dear mother would stand as immovable as a statue until I released her; and then, dropping her arms, or rising from her stooping posture, with a sigh of relief which she could not suppress, she would fall into ecstasies with my work, whether it were good or bad. Uncle Bryan was a capital study for me, and would smile cynically when I produced any especially ill-favoured sketch of his face or figure. It was but natural that I should make the most careful studies of Jessie; and she, not at all unwilling, posed for me half a dozen times a week, until my desk was filled with sketches of her in scores of graceful attitudes and positions. Her face was my principal study; and I sketched it with so many different expressions upon it, that before long I knew it by heart, and could see it

with my eyes shut—smiling, or pouting, or looking demurely at me. Jessie inspected every scrap of my work, and very promptly tore into pieces anything that did not please her, saying she did not want any ugly likenesses of herself lying about. I made studies of her eyes, her lips, her ears, her hands ; and we passed a great deal of time together in this way, to our mutual satisfaction. We were allowed full liberty ; but I sometimes detected uncle Bryan observing us with a curiously pondering expression on his face. This did not trouble me however.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STONE MONKEY FIGURE GIVES UP ITS TREASURES.

I HAD been for some time employed on a large drawing of Jessie, in crayons. It was my first ambitious attempt in colours; and it arose from Jessie's complaint that I could not paint her as she was.

"I am all black and white," she said; "I am tired of seeing myself so. Now, if you could show me my eyes as they are—— What colour are they, Chris?"

Thereupon it was necessary that a close investigation should be made, which was not too rapidly concluded: these matters take a long time to determine, especially when one is an enthusiast in his art, as I was. The next day I bought crayons, and practised

secretly ; and secretly also commenced the sketch of Jessie above mentioned. I was never tired of contemplating my work, which promised to be a success ; and one Sunday, when it was nearly completed, I went to my room to examine it. I kept it carefully concealed in my box, and, after a long examination, I was about to replace it, when I was startled by Jessie's voice, asking me what I was hiding. She had entered the room softly and slyly, on purpose to surprise me, she told me.

"I am certain," she said, "that you are doing something secretly. For the last three or four weeks you have shut yourself in here night after night, for hours together. Now I want to know all about it."

I did not wish her to see the sketch until it was quite finished ; but as she knelt by my side, and as my box was open, I could not prevent her from discovering it.

"Oh, Chris !" she cried ; "it's beautiful !"

And she expressed such praise of it that my heart thrilled with delight.

“ You think it’s like you, then, Jessie ? ”

“ Like me ! It’s *me*—me, myself ! Set it on the box there ; I’ll show you.”

And with a rapid movement she altered the fashion of her hair to suit my picture, and assumed the exact expression I had chosen. She looked very bewitching as she stood before me, the living embodiment of my work. Then she knelt before the box again, and praised the picture still more warmly, analysing it with exclamations of pleasure.

While she was talking and admiring herself, she was tossing over the contents of my box, when she came upon the only legacy my grandmother had left me—the smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone, which the old lady had solemnly confided to my care. From the day I had entered uncle Bryan’s house it had lain in my box, and by this time I had almost forgotten it ; but as Jessie held it up and turned it about, my mind was strangely stirred by those reminiscences of my early life with which it was inseparably connected.

"What a curious image!" exclaimed Jessie.
"How long have you had it?"

"All my life, Jessie. Put it away; it's the ugliest thing that ever was seen."

"I don't think so. It's funny; look at it, wagging its head. Why, you seem quite frightened of it! Well, then, I shall take it, and keep it in my room."

"No, I mustn't part with it. It was given to me by my grandmother, and she said that it must be kept always in the family. Not that I think much of what she said."

Jessie shifted her position, and seated herself very comfortably upon the floor.

"Now you've got something to tell me," she said, pulling me down beside her. "I've never heard of your grandmother before, and you know how fond I am of stories."

"But mine is not a story, and there's nothing interesting to tell."

"Oh, yes, there is; there must be. Everybody's life is full of stories."

"Yours, Jessie?" I put the question somewhat timorously.

"Perhaps," she answered gravely; and added, after a short pause, "But we're not speaking of me; we're speaking of you. I want to know everything."

But it was long before she could coax me to speak of my early life. There was much that I felt I should be ashamed for Jessie to know; and a burning blush came to my cheeks as I thought of the time when my mother used to beg for our living. To escape too searching an inquiry I began to tell her of my grandmother, which led naturally to the story of my grandmother's wedding. Of course the man with the knob on the top of his head, and who was always eating his nails, was introduced, he being the principal figure at the wedding.

"There!" cried Jessie. "You said you hadn't any story to tell. Why, you've told me half a dozen already! I can see your grandmother as plain as plain can be; and that disagreeable man, too—I wonder what

became of him, after all? What was his name, Chris?"

"Anthony Bullpit."

"I hate the name of Anthony. Go on; I want to hear more."

I gave a description of Jane Painter, at which Jessie laughed heartily, and clapped her hands.

"I shall come into your bed-room one night with a sheet over me, and frighten you."

"I shouldn't be frightened of you, Jessie; besides, I am not a boy now, and I'm not afraid of anything. Then your voice——"

"Well!"

"Your voice is musical. How could you frighten anybody with it?"

Jessie edged a little closer to me.

"Go on, Chris. Anything more about Jane Painter? What a wretch she must have been!"

Then came an account of my grandmother's death, and the legend of the long stocking, in which Jessie was immensely interested.

"And you never found any money after all, Chris?"

"No; and I'm sure we searched for it everywhere. We looked up the chimney, and ripped the bed open, and pulled the arm-chair all to pieces."

"I'd have had the cellar dug up," cried Jessie excitedly; "I'd have had the paper taken off the walls, and the flooring taken away bit by bit. I am certain the money was hidden somewhere."

I shook my head.

"Or Jane Painter stole it," she continued. "I sha'n't sleep to-night for thinking of it. I do so like to find out things! And I'd like to find out this thing more than any other."

"Why, Jessie?"

"Such a lot of money, Chris! Hundreds and hundreds of pounds there must have been hidden away, or stolen. Hundreds and hundreds of pounds!"

"Would you like to be rich, Jessie?"

"Chris," she replied, looking at me seri-

ously, "I think I would do anything in the world for money."

A miserable feeling came over me, and for the first time in my life I repined at my lot. What would I not have sacrificed at that moment if I could have filled her lap with money! All this time Jessie had been playing with the stone monkey figure, and now she suddenly uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Look!" she cried. "The head comes off. It isn't broken; here's the wire it hangs upon. Why, Chris!——"

She seized my hand in uncontrollable excitement, and hid the figure in her lap.

"What's the matter, Jessie?"

"There's something inside. It's stuffed full of paper. What if it should be your grandmother's money?"

The amazing suggestion almost took away my breath.

"It's just the kind of place," continued Jessie, panting, "she would have hidden it in. She kept it all in large bank-notes,

and stuffed them in here, where nobody could possibly suspect they were, and where she could have them under her eye all the day. Oh, Chris! feel how my heart beats!”

My excitement was now as great as her own.

“Quick, Jessie! Let us look!”

“No,” she cried, covering the figure with both hands, “let us wait a bit. This is the best part of things: knowing that something wonderful is coming, and waiting a little before it comes. How much is it? A hundred pounds! Five hundred pounds! It can’t be less, for you say she always wore silk dresses. What will you do with it? We’ll all have new clothes. I know where there’s such a lovely blue barege, and I saw a hat in a window yesterday, trimmed with blue ribbon, and with lilies and forget-me-nots in it, that I’d give my life for. Oh, Chris! I can see myself in them already.”

So she went on for fully five minutes,

building her castles ; then with a long-drawn breath she said,

“ Now, Chris ! ”

The inside of the figure was certainly full of paper, which I fished out very easily with one of Jessie's hair-pins, and amid a little cloud of dust—emblematical of Jessie's castles, for the paper was utterly valueless. She refused to believe me at first, and when she was convinced, her disappointment took the form of anger against my grandmother ; she declared that the old lady had done it on purpose, and that she was a spiteful, wicked, deceitful old creature. I was quite as disappointed as Jessie was, more for her sake than my own, and I tried to talk her into a better mood. Thinking there might be writing on some of the paper, I smoothed it out, piece by piece ; but there was nothing written or printed on any of it with the exception of one long slip, which was evidently a cutting from a newspaper. It was headed, “ Remarkable Discovery of a Forger by the Celebrated Detective, Mr. Vinnicombe.” And

glancing down the column, the name of Anthony Bullpit attracted my attention. I became interested immediately.

“Here’s something, at all events,” I said; “something about my grandmother’s nail-eating lover. Listen, Jessie.”

“I don’t want to hear anything about him,” replied Jessie, in a pet, leaving the room.

So I read this “Remarkable Discovery” quietly by myself. It ran as follows :

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRUE STORY OF ANTHONY BULLPIT.

“AMONG the cases tried at the late assizes was one not only of local interest, but exceedingly remarkable, because of the extraordinary circumstances attendant upon the arrest of the prisoner, who, after the commission of his crime, had absconded. We throw the particulars of this case into the form of a narrative, as being likely to prove more interesting to our readers. The three principal characters in the story are Mr. James Pardon, a solicitor; Mr. Anthony Bullpit, his confidential clerk; and Mr. Vinicombe, a detective. These terse definitions would be sufficient for dramatic purposes, but a more comprehensive description is necessary

here for the purposes of our story. Mr. James Pardon is the head of the well-known and highly-respected firm of solicitors in High-street, and to his care is intrusted a vast amount of important business. Not only as a solicitor, but as a man and a church-warden his name commands universal respect. He employs a large staff of clerks, conspicuous among whom was Anthony Bullpit, who had been in his service from boyhood, and whose face is familiar to most of our townsmen. Mr. Vinnicombe, we need scarcely say, is the name of the celebrated detective whose unerring instinct, in conjunction with a powerful and keen intellect, has been the means of bringing many a criminal to justice. In his profession, Mr. Vinnicombe is *facile princeps*. There is a fourth character, who plays a minor but important part, and whom it will be sufficiently explicit to describe as Mr. Vinnicombe's friend. Now for the story.

“To all outward appearance trustworthy and attentive to his duties, Anthony Bullpit rose step by step in the office of Mr. James Pardon

until he had arrived at the position of head clerk ; his manners were civil and plausible, and not the slightest suspicion was entertained of his honesty. He had access to the safe and cheque-book of the firm, and was intrusted with much confidential business. On the twenty-first of last month Mr. James Pardon had occasion to go to London on a matter of great importance ; he expected to be absent for at least three weeks, and Anthony Bullpit was left to superintend the affairs of the firm. It fortunately happened that Mr. Pardon's business in London was transacted more rapidly than he had anticipated, and he returned to Hertford, without warning, after an absence of fourteen days only. His confidential clerk was absent ; and to his astonishment he was informed that, three days before his return, Anthony Bullpit had stated in the office that he had received a letter from Mr. Pardon, desiring his immediate attendance in London, to render assistance in the matter on which Mr. Pardon was engaged. As Mr. Pardon had sent no

such letter to Anthony Bullpit, his suspicions that all was not as it should be were naturally aroused, and he at once made an examination of the affairs of the business. A very slight inquiry was sufficient to justify his suspicions: not only had all the money which had been received during his absence been abstracted, but a cheque for seven hundred pounds, taken from his cheque-book, and purporting to be signed by James Pardon, had been presented at the bank, and cashed without hesitation. The signature was a most skilful imitation, and Mr. Pardon acknowledges that any person might have been deceived by it. Thus far the story is, unhappily, but an ordinary one in the history of crime; but now come the extraordinary incidents which elevate it almost into the sphere of romance. Mr. Pardon's indignation was extreme, and being determined to bring the delinquent to justice, he went at once to the police-court, and laid his charge. While it was being taken down a person, who did not appear to be particularly interested in the narration, was sitting

by the fire, apparently deeply engaged in a newspaper which he held in his hand. When Mr. Pardon had finished, he gave expression to his indignation, and to his determination to inflict upon the forger the utmost punishment of the law. The person who was reading by the fire said aloud, 'First catch your hare, then cook it.' Mr. Pardon, not being aware whether the stranger was quoting from the paper he was reading or was making an independent observation, asked, in his quick manner, whether the words were addressed to him. 'To any one,' answered the stranger. 'And you said——' prompted Mr. Pardon. 'I said,' repeated the stranger, 'first catch your hare, then cook it. You see,' added the stranger, 'the first thing you have to do is to catch your clerk; then you can cook him—not before. Now how are you going to do it?' Mr. Pardon confessed that he did not know how it was to be done, but he supposed that the police—— The stranger interrupted him. 'This clerk, Anthony Bullpit, is more

than a match for the police. You acknowledge that your name was so skilfully forged that you might have been taken in by it yourself. Now, the skill which enabled Anthony Bullpit to write your name in such a way as might deceive even you, was not acquired in an hour or a day. He has been secretly practising your signature for years, and has been secretly practising, I don't doubt, many other things you're not acquainted with, which might come useful to him one day or another. What does this imply? That Anthony Bullpit is a shallow bungling sort of criminal, or an artful, scheming, designing sort of criminal?' Mr. Pardon, himself the shrewdest of lawyers, was struck by the shrewd intelligence of the stranger, and admitted that it was clear that Anthony Bullpit was a scheming, artful, designing scoundrel. 'But he had a quiet way with him,' said Mr. Pardon, 'that any person might have been taken in by.' The stranger smiled. 'One of your sneaking kind,' he said; 'I know them. They're the

most difficult to deal with, and the most difficult to catch. The chances are that Anthony Bullpit had all his plans well laid beforehand. And don't forget that he's got three days' start. Why, you don't even know what road he has taken!' Mr. Pardon acknowledged the reasonableness of these observations. 'May I ask,' he said, 'with whom I have the pleasure of conversing?' 'My name is Vinnicombe,' replied the stranger, rising. 'Mr. Vinnicombe, the famous detective!' exclaimed Mr. Pardon. 'The same,' was the answer. Mr. Pardon immediately made a proposition to Mr. Vinnicombe, and the result was that, within an hour, Mr. Vinnicombe presented himself at Mr. Pardon's office, saying that he was ready to take the case in hand at once. What follows is from the eminent detective's own lips, *verbatim et literatim*, taken down in our own office by the editor of this paper : *

* It is evident, from the manner in which he presented his report of the case to his readers, that "the editor of

“ ‘The first thing Mr. Pardon wanted me to do,’ said Mr. Vinnicombe, ‘was to trace the notes;’ but I said, ‘No; the thief first, the property afterwards.’ If I could trace him by the property, all right; but there was no time to lose in ascertaining what road he had taken, and where he was bound to. In a very short time I discovered by what means and by what road Anthony Bullpit had left the town. The road did *not* lead to Liverpool, and immediately I learnt this, I decided that Liverpool was the port which he intended to reach. Why port? you ask. Well, it wasn’t likely that a cunning card like this Bullpit was going to remain in England. I picked up a bit of gossip concerning him, and I found out that he had had a love affair with a young

this paper” was in advance of his times; he would have made an admirable descriptive reporter in these days. Mr. Vinnicombe also, as is apparent from the style of the narrative, was an advanced detective; but the qualities which are necessary for the making of a good detective, and the spirit which animates the class, do not differ, whatever the year.—AUTHOR.

lady—I mention no names, and I only mention *it* professionally—and that her family, not liking his sneaking ways, had shut their doors on him; I found out also that this young lady was soon to be married to a gentleman who was more worthy of her. That was one reason why it wasn't likely he was going to remain in England; having filled his pockets with another man's money was another reason. But there were stronger reasons than these. He had peculiar marks about him, and if he wasn't found out to-day by these marks, he would be to-morrow; and he knew it. So what he had to do was to get out of the country as quick as he could. Now, there's only two ports in England from where a man as wants to go can go to all parts of the world, civilised and uncivilised. These ports are London and Liverpool.

“ ‘Bullpit wouldn't go to London. Why? Mr. Pardon was there. He'd go naturally to Liverpool, because Mr. Pardon was *not* there. Now, I'll tell you about these peculiar

marks of his. First, he had a knob on the top of his head. But the knob couldn't be seen, you'll say, because he had a bushy head of hair. That's right enough, but it don't do away with the knob; he had it, and that was enough for me. I don't know as ever I had any business in connection with a man as had a knob on his head, and that circumstance made the case interesting to me. I like to do with all sorts. Second, he had a peculiarity with his teeth. The two middle ones in the top jaw—I hope you don't think I'm going to swear or use bad language; but jaw's a word, and when a word's got to be used, I use it—the two middle teeth in his top jaw had a slit between 'em, a slit as you could see daylight through, if there was such a thing in his mouth. That slit ain't much, you'll say. All right. Third, he had a habit of biting his nails. Well, now, that ain't a crime, you say. *I* don't say it is, but he had it, and that was enough for me. These peculiarities and a general description of Bullpit—as to how tall he was (a man

can't alter *that*), how stout (nor *that*), what kind of complexion, and other personal details—were all I had to go upon. I tracked him, without ever making a miss, in the contrary direction of Liverpool, and then back again by another road, in the direction of Liverpool, and there I lost sight of him completely. But I knew he must be there, and that was enough for me. I had travelled faster than he had, and I reckoned I had gained a day and a half on him. According to my calculation, he hadn't had time to get away yet; he could only have been in Liverpool two days, and as Mr. Pardon wasn't expected home for a week after he left, there was no need for him to put on any show of hurry; it might look suspicious. Now what should I do? Bullpit would be sure to disguise himself—clap on a pair of false whiskers and coloured spectacles perhaps, cut his hair short, wear a wig; he would certainly not walk about in the clothes he run away in. Thinking of these things I felt that Bullpit might prove more than a match for *me*. There was

the knob on his head certainly ; but I couldn't go up to every suspicious-looking stranger, pull off his hat, and feel for the knob ; people might resent it as a liberty, and treat it accordingly. There was his habit of biting his nails ; but he would be sure to restrain himself, though it *is* about the most difficult thing in the world for a man to keep from, when he's been accustomed to it all his life. I don't see what there is in nails except dirt to make people fond of 'em. They ain't sweet, and they ain't tasty. Well, but Bullpit. He'd be cunning enough to restrain *himself* from biting his nails, knowing it was a mark to go by ; still, nails don't grow in a day, and they'd be short on *his* fingers naturally. But he'd wear gloves. Then the slit between his teeth. Well, that couldn't be altered ; but he could keep his mouth shut. Now if I was to tell you everything I did in the first two days I was in Liverpool, it would fill a book, and that's what you don't want ; what you *do* want is for me to come to the point, and that I'll do in a jiffey. I

went down to the docks, and took up my lodgings near there; I didn't stop in any particular place, but shifted from one eating-house to another, and mixed with the customers, and talked to the waiters; no ship sailed out of the Mersey without my being on it at the last minute, with my eyes wide open; I communicated with the captains and the ship-agents; I watched every new arrival at the eating-houses, and drank with them, and did a hundred other things—and at the end of the fourth day I was as far off as ever; I hadn't picked up a link. Now, that nettled me; it did—it nettled me. I had set my heart on catching this Bullpit; he was worth catching, he was such a sly cunning customer; I looked upon it as a match between us, and I wanted to win, and here was I four days in Liverpool, with never a link in my hands for my pains. On the fifth day I met—quite by accident—a professional friend, who had come down to Liverpool to say good-bye to a relative of his who was going to America. The ship

was to sail that afternoon; it was called the Prairie Bird. We had a bit of dinner together in the coffee-room, where other men were dining. Over dinner I told my friend what had brought *me* to Liverpool; I spoke in a low tone, so as not to be overheard, and I was not sorry when the man who was eating at the next table to ours went away in the middle of my story; he was a little too close to us. Well, we finished dinner; my friend insisted on paying the reckoning, and I moved a step or two towards the next table, where the man who went away in the middle of my story had been dining. The waiter was clearing the table, when I saw something that set me on fire. Now, what do you think it was? You can't guess. I should think you couldn't, if you tried for a week. What do you say to a piece of bread? You laugh! Well, but that piece of bread was enough for me. It wasn't a link. It was the chain itself. In what way? I'll tell you. You see, that piece of bread was partly eaten, and the

man who had been dining had put it down after taking his last bite at it. The marks of his teeth were in it, but the only mark I saw was a little ridge in the centre of the bite—just such a ridge as would be left by a man who had a slit between two of his upper teeth, as Anthony Bullpit had. Would that little mark have been enough for you?

“ ‘Now I had seen this man a dozen times ; a most respectable-looking man he was, with leg-of-mutton whiskers, and most respectably dressed, something like a clergyman ; and I knew he was a passenger by the Prairie Bird. I had never for one moment suspected him. Anthony Bullpit was a pale-faced man ; this man had a high colour. There was nothing particular in Anthony Bullpit’s walk ; this man dragged one leg behind the other slightly. Anthony Bullpit’s hair was black ; this man’s hair was sandy. Anthony Bullpit had good eyebrows ; this man had no eyebrows at all to speak of. Ah, he’s a cunning rascal is Anthony Bullpit, and was worth catching. I put things together very quickly in my

mind, and I settled it—if it wanted settling after the first sight of that piece of bread—that this man, and no other, was the man I wanted. There was only one thing that puzzled me, and that was his nails; they were long. However, I wasn't going to let that stop me, so I laid a little plot with my professional friend, and we went aboard the *Prairie Bird*—not in company, because of the little plot I laid, but one a minute after the other. There was my respectable customer, standing by himself; I was puzzled even then as I looked at him, he was so well disguised; but his height was there, and his bulk was there, with a little added to it, which might be padding. Well, while I stood a little distance away, with my eye on him, but not in an open way, my professional friend walks up to him from behind, until he gets close, and this is what my professional friend whispers to him: 'Don't start,' whispers my professional friend, most confidentially; 'don't turn your head, or it might attract notice. My name's Simpson, and I cashed

the cheque for seven hundred pounds for you in the Hertford Bank. I was in the bank for six years, and I've done a little bit of business on my own account, and have got clear away. Twelve hundred pounds I've got about me, and I'm a fellow passenger of yours; when the Prairie Bird gets to America, what's to hinder you and me going partners and making our fortunes? Two such heads as ours'll be sure to make a big one. I sha'n't speak another word to you till we're safely off, but I'm glad I've got a friend on board.' With that, my professional friend slips quietly away. Now, if my respectable-looking customer hadn't been the man I wanted, he would have turned round on my professional friend, and hit him in the eye perhaps; at all events, he would have kicked up a row. But he listened to every word, with his eyes looking down on the deck, and the only movement he made was a kind of twitching with his fingers, and a rising of them to his lips, as if he wanted to set to work on his nails.

He didn't get so far as his mouth with them; he had himself too well in hand; but I was sure of my man—his own cunning was the trap in which he was caught. I waited until the last minute, until those who weren't going to the other side of the Atlantic in the Prairie Bird were scrambling away lest they should be taken by mistake; and I saw my respectable friend give one triumphant look around, being sure then he was safe. At the same moment, as if he couldn't stand it any longer, up went his fingers to his lips; his longing to get at those nails of his must have been something dreadful. Then I stepped up to him suddenly, and before he knew where he was I had the handcuffs on him. 'It's no use making a noise about it,' I said; 'I want you, Anthony Bullpit. Here's the warrant.' And quick as lightning I passed my hand over his head, and felt the knob. He saw it was all over with him, and I could see that he turned deadly white, for all his false colour. 'You sha'n't be done out of a voyage across the sea,' I

said ; ‘but it’ll be a longer voyage than the one to America. Botany Bay ’ll be the place as ’ll suit *you* best, I should think.’ He never spoke a word ; I got his trunk, and found the money in it—all changed into gold it was, the cunning one. Well, everything was comfortably arranged, and I was about to guide him down the ladder to the boat, when he whispered to me, ‘There’s another man on board as you’d like to have. He’s a better prize than I am. If you’ll make it easier for me, I’ll tell you who it is.’ ‘What man?’ I asked, with a quiet chuckle. ‘A man as has robbed the bank of twelve hundred pound.’ Just then my professional friend came to my side. ‘That’s him,’ said Anthony Bullpit. ‘And you and him’s going partners when you get safe across,’ I said, with a wink at my professional friend ; he cashed that cheque for you, didn’t he? Lord ! you’re not half as clever as I took you to be!’ He was clever enough to understand it all without another word, for he only gave a scowl ; and when

me and him and my professional friend was in the boat, he fell to on his nails without restraint, and before the day was out he had eaten them down to the quick. He only asked one question, and that was how I had discovered him. I pulled the piece of bread from my pocket, and pointed to the marks of his teeth in it, and to the ridge the slit in his teeth had left. I brought my man safely back, and you know what has become of him. If I live till I'm a hundred—which isn't likely—I shall never forget the feeling that came over me when I saw that piece of bread with the ridge in it that brought Anthony Bullpit to justice.'

"We have only to add to Mr. Vinnicombe's statement—that Anthony Bullpit, when placed in the dock, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation. The sentence would have been for life, but for Mr. Pardon's intercession, who pleaded for mercy for the infamous scoundrel who had abused his trust. We have occupied more space than we otherwise should have done

with the details of this case, for the purpose of pointing out how often the most trivial circumstance will lead to the detection and punishment of the most cunning criminals."

Apart from the circumstance of this Anthony Bullpit being one of my grandmother's lovers, the narrative was interesting to me from the really remarkable manner in which the forger was discovered. I refolded the printed paper carefully, and replaced it in the interior of the stone figure; and in the course of a couple of days I made a drawing of Anthony Bullpit, as I imagined him to be, a sneaking hang-dog figure of a man, with a hypocritical face, gnawing his finger-nails.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE BRYAN COMMENCES THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

“CHRIS is growing quite a man,” observed my mother one evening to uncle Bryan.

Her words attracted uncle Bryan’s attention, and he regarded me with more interest than he usually evinced. We three were alone. Jessie was spending the evening with some neighbours, and was not expected home before ten o’clock. The family she visited was named West. I did not know them personally, but I was curious about them, not only because Jessie’s visits to their house had lately grown very frequent, but because they were a theatrical family. They were, in a certain sense, famous in the neighbour-

hood because of their vocation, which lifted them out of the humdrum ordinary course of common affairs. During the whole time we had lived in Paradise-row, I had made no friends among our neighbours. It was different with Jessie : before she had been with us six months, she knew and was known by nearly every person in the locality. She informed me that she was fond of company, and she accepted invitations to tea from one and another. But lately she had confined her intimacy to the Wests, and whenever I came home, and she was absent, I was told she was spending an hour at their house. Many weeks before the observation which commences this chapter was made, Jessie and I had had a conversation about the Wests. She introduced their name, and after informing me that she was going to have tea with them on the following evening, asked me if I would come for her at nine o'clock and bring her home. But I demurred to this, as being likely to be considered an intrusion.

“What nonsense you talk!” she exclaimed. “They are the most delightful persons in the world.”

“Your friendships are quickly made, Jessie,” I said with a jealous pang.

“Directly I see persons I know whether I like them or not. Don’t you?”

“I can’t say,” I replied sententiously; “I have never considered it.”

“Well, consider it now. Don’t be disagreeable. Directly you saw me, didn’t you like me?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Very well, then; that shows you *do* make up your mind properly about these things, as a man ought to do.”

I thrilled with pleasure at this cunning compliment.

“But you are different, Jessie, from any one else.” (What I really wanted to say was, “You are different in my eyes from any one else;” but the most important words oozed away, from my want of courage.)

“Am I?” she cried softly and complacently, as was her way when she felt she was about to be flattered. “How different? In what way? Tell me.”

“You are prettier and nicer. There’s no one in the world like you.”

“That’s what you think.”

“That’s what everybody must think.”

“Why, Chris!” she exclaimed, making a telescope with her two hands, and peeping at me through them, “I declare your moustachios are coming.”

I blushed scarlet. “Are they?” I inquired, with an effort at unconsciousness, notwithstanding that I had already many times secretly contemplated in my looking glass, with the most intense interest, these coming signs of manliness. “But never mind them, Jessie; tell me about the Wests.”

“They are the most wonderful people, and the most delightful. I’m in love with all of them.”

My blushes died away; jealous pangs assailed me again.

“Are there many of them?” I asked gloomily.

“Ever so many; but you must see for yourself. You will come for me, then? You mustn’t knock at the door and say, ‘Tell Miss Trim I am waiting for her;’ you must come right into the house.”

But being angry with the Wests, and beginning to hate them because Jessie was so fond of them, I insisted that it would not be proper, because I had never been invited; and after a little quarrel, in which I deemed it necessary, as an assertion of manliness, to become more and more obstinate in my refusal, Jessie said with a pout, “Oh, very well; if you’re determined to stand upon your dignity, you’ll see that other people can do so as well as you.” Thus it fell about that it became a point almost of honour with me not to go to the Wests, nor to express any desire to go; but I suffered agonies in consequence, and was tempted many times to humble myself. Jessie knew as well as possible what was

going on in my mind ; but she was offended with me on the subject, and would not assist me—would not even give me an opportunity of humbling myself.

But all this while I have left uncle Bryan regarding me, as I have said, with more than usual interest. From me he turned his attention to the wall, upon which hung the picture of Jessie, in crayons, which I had finished. I said nothing, but proceeded with my work.

“What are you drawing now, Chris?” asked my uncle.

Of course it was a sketch of Jessie. I murmured some words to the effect that it was nothing particular, and was about to put it in my desk, when uncle Bryan expressed a wish to see it. I could not refuse, and I handed it to him. It happened to be one of my happiest efforts ; it would have been difficult to find a more winsome face than that which uncle Bryan gazed upon. He contemplated it for a long time without speaking—for so long a time that I asked

him if he liked it, so as to break the awkward silence. He did not answer me. With the sketch still in his hand he said to my mother,

“Emma, I have not treated you fairly.”

My mother looked up from her work in surprise. Uncle Bryan continued :

“What I am about to tell you ought to have been told before ; but probably no better time than this could be chosen. By the time I have finished, you will perhaps understand my motive for saying so ; but whether you do or not, it is due to you that I should clear away some part of the mystery which hangs around Jessie.”

Although I was burning with curiosity, I rose to leave the room, thinking from his manner that what he was about to say was intended only for my mother's ears.

“Nay, Chris,” he said, “you can stay. You are almost a man, as your mother says, and you may learn something from my words. I am about to read some pages in my life.”

He turned from us, so that we could not see his face; and full five minutes elapsed before he spoke. I was awaiting to hear with so much eagerness what he had to tell, that the five minutes seemed an hour. With his face still averted, he addressed my mother.

“Emma, you know the house in which I was born?”

“Yes, Bryan.”

“And you knew my family—my father and mother?”

“Yes.”

“They are not alive?”

I could scarcely restrain an exclamation of surprise at such a question from the lips of a son concerning his parents. My mother's tone was soft and pitiful as she replied,

“They have been dead many years, Bryan. They died within a year of my marriage with your brother.”

“During the time you and my brother courted, and afterwards, indeed, my name must have been occasionally mentioned.”

. "It was, Bryan."

"In what terms?"

He paused for a reply, but my mother held her tongue.

"Be frank and candid with me, Emma; it will not hurt me. What you heard was not to my credit?"

He was determined that the subject should not be evaded; and my mother was wise enough not to thwart him.

"It was said that you had a violent temper."

"It was doubtless true; but," said uncle Bryan somewhat grimly, "time must have softened it. No one now can accuse me justly—if there is such a thing as justice in the world—of showing violence, in the ordinary meaning of the word."

"I can bear witness to that, Bryan."

"Go on; there was more."

"And that it was impossible to agree with you, or your opinions."

"My opinions! That is one of the things I wanted to arrive at. Remember,

Emma, that after I left home, I held no communication with my parents ; that I was as one dead to them. What was said of my opinions ? Nay, nay ; you hurt me more by your silence than you can possibly do by anything you can say."

"I heard that, as a boy, you associated yourself with a society of Freethinkers, who openly boasted of their infidelity."

"I can guess the rest ; I was wanting in respect to my elders, and in obedience and duty. They did not spare me, evidently. When I left home I was seventeen years of age ; I ran away—no, I walked away, in fact, for they did not care to stop me—as much displeased with the narrow-minded views of those who were nearest to me in blood, as they were doubtless with my violent temper and my independent expression of opinion. A free exercise of the reasoning powers with which we are endowed was, in their eyes, a distinct crime. Still, when I was fairly gone, they might have let me rest. Of my after career they had no knowledge."

These last words he did not put as a question, but as a satisfactory reflection. The simplest assent from my mother would have contented him ; but she was too truthful to give utterance to it, and all his suspicions were aroused by her silence.

“I repeat—of my after career they had no knowledge.”

She would have spared him, but he would not allow her to do so.

“They had !” he exclaimed, his rapid breathing showing how deeply he was moved. “What did they know ?”

“The rumour was very vague, Bryan——”

“But discreditable. To what effect ?”

“I really cannot explain, nor could they have done so, I believe.” My mother was much distressed. “If Chris were not here——”

“Say no more.” I could not see his face, but his tone indicated that he had recovered his composure. “I can fill up the blanks. Chris is older than I was when I threw myself upon the world, and it will be best for him to hear the story I shall relate.”

“Whatever impression I might have gained,” said my mother, solicitously, “from the vague rumours I heard has been entirely obliterated since I have known you. Believe me that this is so, dear Bryan.”

“Thank you for saying so much. But I doubt whether my parents would ever have believed that I was not the blackest of black sheep. They were hard and intolerant to me from the first, and I have no pleasurable recollections of even my earliest days. I do not know if it was the same when you were first introduced into it as it is in my remembrance, but the home in which I was born and reared was ruled by cold and formal laws, and by a cold and formal master. How it came about is a mystery I have never tried to solve, but it is a plain fact that I was not a favourite with my parents. My brother—your husband—was; he was much younger than I, but I saw it clearly. His nature was a more pliable one than mine; he could be easily led, not because he was weak, but because he was.

sympathetic and amiable. I was neither. Perhaps I imbibed some drops of gall with my mother's milk; but I don't pretend to account for my cross grain. My parents might have loved me after their fashion, but their mode of showing their love deprived it of all tenderness. It is a blessing to a man to be able to think of his mother with affection and veneration when she has passed away from him. Such a feeling, and the roads he must have trodden to acquire it, are a counterfoil to much that may be bad in his own nature; but this feeling is not mine. My mother was a weak-minded woman, entirely dominated by the strong mind of her husband. She had no will of her own; she followed the current of his likes and dislikes, of his opinions, of his commands, without question and without inquiry, as a spaniel follows its master. Many persons would see a kind of virtue in this submission; I do not. My father was dogmatic and stern; I could have forgiven him that, if he had been honest-minded. But he

was a hypocrite, and I knew it, and he knew that I knew it. With great appearance of candour, he, when conversing with acquaintances in the presence of my mother and myself, would give expression to sentiments in which he did not believe; then, when we were alone, he would take off his mask of dissimulation, and go over the ground again according to his own conviction, and justify his deceit. If my mother ever thought of these things, she must have been bewildered; I did think of them, and I was indignant. Most especially was he a hypocrite in religious matters; his prayers and his practice were utterly at variance. I could not respect one who professed to believe that charity was a good thing, and who declined to practise it. He was intolerant to a degree; his was the only right way—all others were wrong. It was my evil fortune—I suppose I must call it so—to possess a mind which led me to sift things for myself; I *could* not accept established doctrines, and this, in my father's eyes, was not only a great presumption but

a great crime. It is not necessary for me to state how, little by little, I became estranged from such parental affection as might have been bestowed on me had I been docile and obedient—as might have been mine if I had tried to win it. I sought for congenial companionship away from the social circle in which my parents moved; it is true that I found associates among men who, doubtless with more reason than myself, were dissatisfied with things as they were, and that I identified myself—being, as a youth, proud of the connection—with a body of so-called Freethinkers, whose chief crime was that they were groping to find truth by the light of reason. My father, hearing of this connection, sternly commanded me to relinquish it, and when I refused, threatened me. He declared he would drive the evil spirit out of me, and he tried to do so by blows; but he hurt only my body—my spirit he strengthened. About this time a circumstance occurred which for ever destroyed all chance of peace between us. We had a servant at

home, a poor half-witted creature—an orphan without a friend in the world. One would have supposed that my father, being so fond of his prayers, would have been kind to this servant because of her utterly dependent condition, and because she performed her work as well and as faithfully as her dull wits allowed her. Had this been so, I think I might have been inclined to waver in my estimate of him; but the contrary was the case. My father, through his unvarying harshness towards the poor girl, made her life a torture to her. I constituted myself her champion, and stepped between her and his blows many a time. Boy as I was, he chose to place misconstruction upon my championship, and each became more embittered against the other. I fed my bitterness by contemplation of the girl's misery, and the unhappy war went on until it was terminated by a tragic circumstance. One day the servant was missing; the next, her body was found in the river. The idea fixed itself firmly in my mind that my father was ac-

countable for her death ; I even hinted as much to him when my blood was boiling with a new injustice inflicted upon myself. What passed between us after that, it will be as well not to recall ; the result was that I left my home, and no hand was held out to stay me. I never saw my parents from that day, nor have I ever mentioned them until this evening. Whether I have done them injustice cannot now be decided ; but I have no doubt, if the world were to judge between us, the verdict would be against me.

“I retained my name because, in my opinion, I had done nothing to disgrace it, and because I abhor deceit. I was neither elated nor depressed at the step I had taken. It is said that the spring-time of life is bright with sunshine. The spring-time of my life was joyless and gloomy. I had no hope in anything, no belief in anything, no faith in anything. I had no special ambition and no desire to become rich ; all that I desired was to earn a decent

living by the labour of my hands and the exercise of my abilities. I determined to make no friendships, and to live only in myself and by myself. Although I had no thought of it at the time, I can see now that the rules I laid down for myself were just the rules, with fair opportunities, to lead to success in life.

“In my determination to sever myself entirely from my family, I wandered away from my native place until I was distant from it hundreds of miles. Then, a stranger among strangers, I applied myself to the task of obtaining a situation. I could read, I could write, and I was a fair bookkeeper; but these qualifications did not avail me, and I was driven to hard shifts. Had I been shipwrecked on a lonely land I should have fared better. I did nothing dishonest, nor would I have done it to save my life; and I shrunk from nothing that was not dishonourable to earn a few pence. I accepted employment in whatever shape it was offered; no toil was too low for me, so long as it

would buy me bread. The hardships which the world dealt out to me did not dishearten me, did not humble me; I bore them with pride, and in my bitter frame of mind I found a certain pleasure, even in misery. My unmerited sufferings were arguments to convince me that I was right in my estimate of things. Look where I would, I could nowhere find morality and humanity exercised in their larger sense; where charity was most due, it was least given; virtue and goodness were terms; all over the civilised world religious precepts were being preached; all over the civilised world religious precepts were being violated; what was good in the Bible was turned to bad account—its power was so used as to teach people to fear, not to love. During these days I used to creep into the churches and laugh at the moralities there laid down. It was a hard, bitterly-sweet time. I did not repine; in my pride I exulted in my condition. Many a night did I walk the streets homeless and hungry, laughing at my sufferings. Life had no

attractions for me, and I did not desire to live. But I was part of a scheme—I recognised that, although I could not solve the problem—and I would do nothing to myself; I would simply wait. From men and women in as miserable a position as myself I rejected all overtures of friendship; I had nothing in common with them. But on a starless night I met one to whom I was drawn by humanity, if you like to call it by that name. A woman this, a girl indeed, homeless as I was, friendless as I was. Nay, you may listen, Emma. I became like a brother to her, and she like a sister to me. Neither knew how the other lived, neither asked; and when we were specially unfortunate we wandered by instinct to a certain street, and met by premeditated chance. Then we would talk together for hours, or sit in silence in the shadow of a friendly refuge. She told me her story—a pitiful story, but common: it hardened me the more. I never saw her face by daylight; a dark shadow encompassed her and her

history. 'I am so tired of life!' she said to me; 'these stones must be happier than I, for they cannot feel. Would it be wrong to die?' I drove the thought from her mind. 'Be brave, and play your part,' I said aloud, and added mentally, 'It will not be for long.' I can hear now the faint echo of her dreary laugh at my words, and the strangely-pitiful tone in which she repeated, 'Be brave, and play my part!' I knew she would not live long; a desperate cold had settled on her lungs, and her cough, as we walked the desolate streets or sat in them after midnight, was a sound to cause the stars to weep. She died in my arms during one of these wanderings. I had no special foreboding of her death, nor had she, I believe; she was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and she clung to me, as she had often done, for support, then suddenly she fell to the ground, and I saw blood coming from her mouth. 'Don't leave me,' she sighed, almost with her last breath; 'you can do me no good. Thank God it is over!' An in-

quest was held, and I gave evidence. Necessarily some particulars concerning my own mode of life came out, and after the inquest a man offered me money. I rejected it; I had resolved never to accept charity. The man was surprised; questioned me; and learning that I was willing to work, offered me employment. I remained with him long enough to clothe myself decently and to save a little money, and then I turned my back upon a place which had become hateful to me. It must have been a rumour of my connection with the poor girl who died in my arms that was twisted to my discredit in my native town, and it was your mention of it that has caused me to drift into details which, when I commenced, I had no intention of relating."

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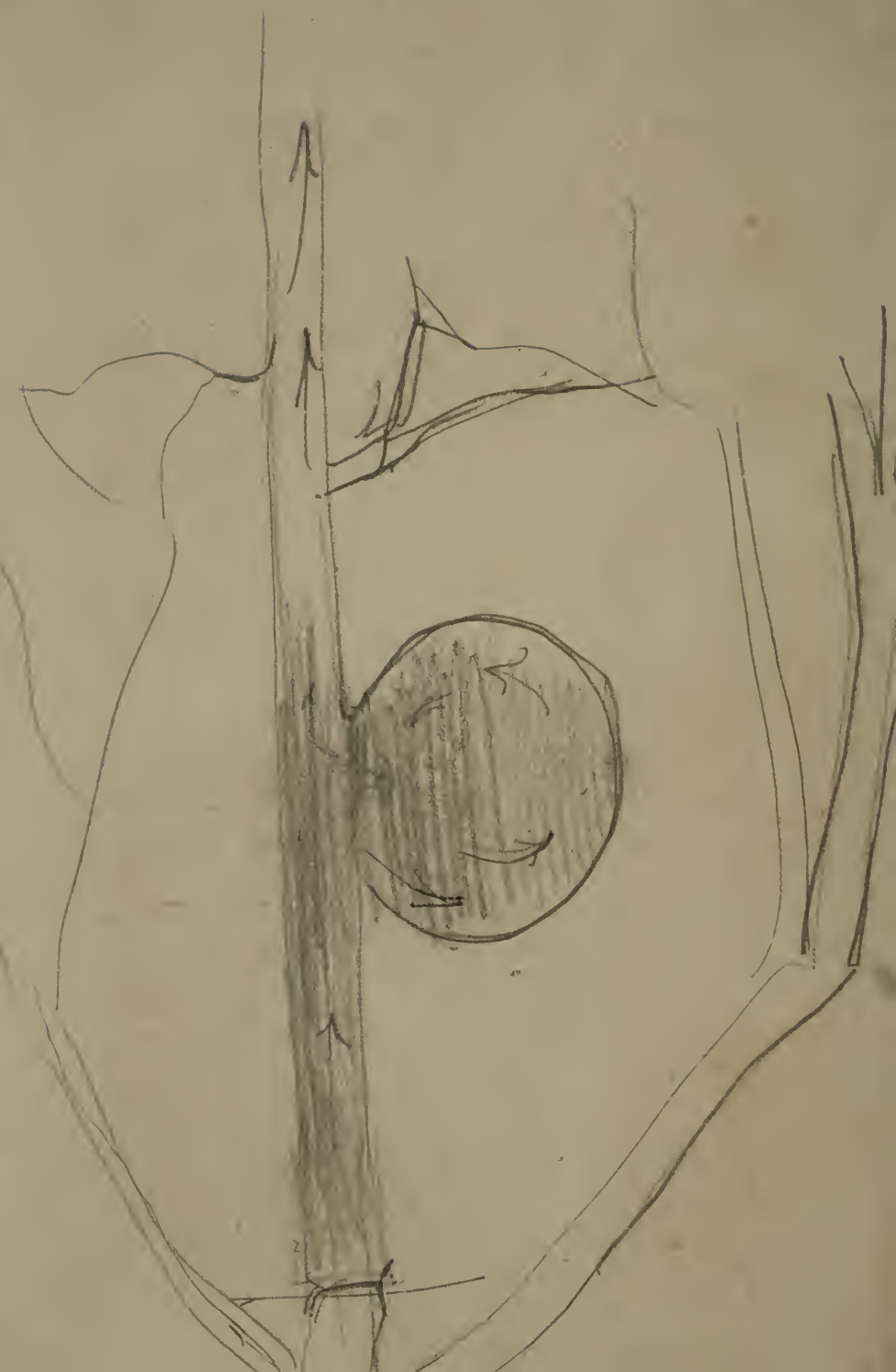
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